CAROLINE;

OR, THE

DIVERSITIES

OF

FORTUNE.

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CAROLINE;

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DIVERSITIES

OF

FORTUNE:

A

NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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CAROLINE,

OR THE

DIVERSITIES OF *FORTUNE.*

CHAP. I.

A Removal.

WHEN Caroline came into the breakfaſt-parlour the next morning, ſhe was ſurprized to ſee no table laid, nor any preparation making. She had not ſtood more than a moment, before Mrs. Auſburn appeared: her eyes were red, and her countenance much diſcompoſed. Caroline eagerly inquired the cauſe of her duſturbance; and, after ſome heſitation,

and a freſh burſt of tears, ſhe learnt that her revered grandmother was found dead in her bed by her woman, who went as uſual to aſſiſt in dreſſing her. The ſhock our heroine felt was inexpreſſible; ſhe turned pale; her limbs trembled, and ſhe ſunk upon the floor in a ſtate of perfect inſenſibility. While ſhe was in this condition, Sir Marmaduke and his lady entered, followed by Mrs. and Miſs Aſhford; they had been ſent for the moment their mother's deceaſe was known; and ſetting out immediately, arrived before Caroline had recovered from her firſt ſurprize.

Mrs. Auſburn gave them the few particulars of their firſt diſcovering the melancholy circumſtance; and Sir Marmaduke, his lady, and Mrs. Aſhford, went up ſtairs; but Eleanor not chuſing ſo diſmal a ſight, remained ſtill below. Caroline by degrees recovered her ſenſes; but ſuch was the oppreſſion ſhe felt, that ſhe was unable to ſpeak or look up. Two of the ſervants aſſiſted in lifting her up, and ſeating her upon a ſopha; which they had juſt effected, when Mrs. Aſhford, whom a ſhort view of her excellent mother had ſatisfied, returned into the room, with a handkerchief held to her eyes. The moment ſhe entered, caſting them towards Caroline, ſhe

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ſhe exclaimed, in a voice of anger, "What, is not this farce ended yet?—But ſhe has reaſon to be grieved; this ſudden death cuts off all hope of her promiſed independence."

So entirely had our heroine been abſorbed in the loſs of a beloved parent, that the thoughts of fortune had not mixed themſelves at all in her diſtreſs; but this cruel triumph of her aunt's, painfully reminded her of the double misfortune ſhe had ſuſtained: the latter, however, made but a ſlight impreſſion upon her mind, which, at that moment, reſentment hardened againſt deſpondency. She roſe, and with ſome dignity walked out of the room; and going to her chamber, indulged a plentiful ſhower of tears, which greatly relieved her ſpirits. 'Yes,' cried ſhe, 'I will return to my humble habitation; ſince there, and there only, I ſhall meet friendſhip and kindneſs. Her greateſt diſturbance aroſe from the thoughts of removing Mrs. Foreſter from the comforts ſhe at that time enjoyed, and obliging her again to ſubmit to the narrow limits of her cottage. She hoped, however, that her preſence would make her ſome amends for the change.

While ſhe was ruminating upon theſe things, ſome body knocked at the door; and, upon opening it, ſhe, to her no ſmall ſurprize, ſaw Lady Aſhford, who, with much kindneſs, aſked her to accompany them to Aſhford Park; telling her, both her uncle and herſelf thought it was quite improper for her to remain behind, as ſhe had now no intereſt there. Caroline ſeverely felt the latter part of her words: ſhe heſitated a moment; but recollecting the wiſh her grandmother had ſo warmly expreſſed of their living upon terms of amity, though ſhe ſcarce believed it poſſible to be accompliſhed, reſolved that the fault ſhould not reſt upon her ſtiffneſs and prejudice, however well founded. She therefore thanked her ladyſhip politely for her invitation, and promiſed to attend her in half an hour. No ſooner was ſhe left alone, than giving her maid orders to put up a few neceſſaries to be taken with her, and telling her that ſhe ſhould not want her attendence during her ſtay at her uncle's, ſhe went ſoftly to the apartment of her grandmother, where ſhe found only Mrs. Auſburn, who was ſitting at ſome diſtance from the venerable remains of her benefactreſs reading. Caroline approached the body: her heart overflowed with

with tenderneſs : ſhe knelt by its ſide ; and gazing for a few moments upon it with reverential law and love, ſhe aroſe. Then ſtooping down, ſhe imprinted a kiſs upon the cold pale lips, and retired, without ſpeaking a word.

A flood of tears, upon her return to her chamber, ſomewhat relieved her full heart ; and after reflecting a ſhort time upon the affecting ſight ſhe had juſt quitted, happening to turn her eyes upon her watch, ſhe perceived the half hour, in which ſhe had promiſed to attend Lady Aſhford, was expired. She therefore directed her maid to carry the parcel ſhe had put ready down to the coach ; and deſired the reſt of her clothes, &c. might be packed up in readineſs, as ſhe did not know how ſoon ſhe might have occaſion to ſend for them. At the ſame time, ſhe deſired Kitty to look out for a place that would ſuit her ; telling her ſhe could no longer afford to keep a ſervant.

Theſe affairs being regulated, ſhe walked down to the breakfaſt-parlour. Juſt as ſhe reached the door, Mrs. Aſhford was ſpeaking in an elevated tone. " I tell you ſiſter," ſaid ſhe, " you will repent what you are about to do ; it is eaſier to bring incumbrances into your houſe than to

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get rid of them." 'I think,' replied Lady Aſhford, 'it is our duty to take care of the poor thing; ſhe has never done any thing to offend us; and it would be cruel to leave her here.' "I think Lady Aſhford is right," ſaid Sir Marmaduke; "the world would blame us; and ſhe need ſtay with us as little time as you will."

Caroline, who deſpiſed the meanneſs of liſtening, now opened the door. "Are you ready, Miſs Caroline?" ſaid Lady Aſhford. 'Yes, Madam,' replied our heroine; 'for a few days I will have the honour of waiting upon you; after which, I am reſolved to return to the valuable friends from whom my dear grandmother lately took me.' "I am glad to hear you have any friends to go to," anſwered Mrs. Aſhford; "as you have now nothing elſe to depend upon, it is a fortunate circumſtance." 'Independence, Madam,' anſwered Caroline, 'doth not conſiſt in the largeneſs of fortune, but in the turn of mind of its poſſeſſor. He who can reſolve to be independent, is ſo.'

There was a firmneſs, a ſuperiority of underſtanding, and dignity of manner, conſpicuous in the voice and looks of the fair ſpeaker while ſhe pronounced theſe words; which

which ſilenced, and even awed her cruel inſulter.

The whole party got into the coach, without uttering another word. Mrs. Aſhford, who went in firſt, took her place in front; her Ladyſhip then requeſted that Caroline would follow, which ſhe accordingly did, placing herſelf by her aunt's ſide. Lady Aſhford ſat oppoſite to her ſiſter, and Miſs Aſhford to Caroline; but when Sir Marmaduke appeared, who had ſtopt to give ſome directions to a ſervant, the aunt and niece looked at each other; the latter with a half-laugh, the former with a diſconted ſhrug, and lifting up of the eyes; at the ſame time crying in a peeviſh accent, "Come, come, Eleanor, you muſt ſit here," making room for her between herſelf and Caroline; "we ſhall be charmingly packed!" Miſs Aſhford did as ſhe was requeſted, often apologizing to her aunt for the neceſſity ſhe was under of crowding her; without taking the leaſt notice of Caroline, who ſuffered the ſame inconvenience.

After a tedious ride they arrived at Aſhford Park; for Sir Marmaduke never would ſuffer his carriage to move at more than the rate of three miles an hour. As they drove up a long avenue leading to the houſe,

Miſs

Miſs Aſhford exclaimed, "Bleſs me! there's a travelling chaiſe at the door!" And her father, putting out his head, replied, 'I warrant, it's William!' Joy ſparkled in the eyes of Lady Aſhford; and even his aunt and ſiſter appeared pleaſed at the expectation of ſeeing him. They were ſcarce alighted from the coach, when a fine-looking young man flew to meet them; and Caroline immediately knew, by the pleaſure they all expreſſed, and the names of ſon, brother, and couſin, which ſhe heard pronounced, that their conjectures were not ill-founded.

Mr. Aſhford had no ſooner paid his reſpects to thoſe preſent, with whoſe right to demand them he was acquainted, than turning to Caroline, he aſked if he might not hope to be honoured with an introduction to that lady? "That is your couſin Caroline Aſhford," anſwered his mother. 'Then,' returned the young gentleman, 'I will take the liberty of introducing myſelf. The name of couſin, my dear Madam,' continued he, approaching her, 'is my privilege.' So ſaying, he ſaluted her in the moſt reſpectful manner; adding, with a ſmile, 'If all my couſins reſemble you, I ſhould wiſh to be introduced to them to the hundredth generation.' Caroline

roline could not ſpeak: the perfect reſemblance ſhe ſaw of her father deprived her of all power but that of gazing. The difference of years excepted, ſhe beheld his very image before her: ſo he looked, ſo he walked, and ſo he ſpoke!

The good-humour into which the arrival of Mr. Aſhford had put the whole family, ſeemed to have obliterated every remembrance of the event which had ſo lately taken place, and might have been expected to have occaſioned at leaſt an appearance of ſerioufneſs among them; but, except in our heroine and Lady Aſhford, who ſeveral times declared, during their ride, that ſhe had loſt one of her deareſt and beſt friends, no alteration ſeemed to have been made in the tempers or ſpirits of the family, after the moment they left the houſe of their deceaſed mother. But when the circumſtance of her death was told to her grandſon, the ſtrongeſt expreſſions of ſurprize and grief took poſſeſſion of his countenance; and he haſtily quitted the room, with every appearance of real ſorrow.

"William was always very fond of my mother," ſaid Sir Marmaduke. 'He would have been very ungratefnl if he had not,' anſwered Lady Aſhton; 'for never parent loved a child more than ſhe did him.'

" She was always fond of favourites," anſwered Sir Marmaduke ; " but I wonder ſhe did not fix upon a younger ſon, according to cuſtom." ' I think,' ſaid Miſs Aſhford, addreſſing her aunt, ' I muſt have ſome new mourning, becauſe you know my beſt ſuit is really got ſhabby. What do you think of a crape chemiſe ?' ' Nothing can be more elegant," replied Mrs. Aſhford. " Do you mean it to be black or white ?" ' A chemiſe !' exclaimed Lady Aſhford ; ' you know I never could bear you in your gauze one : you looked a mere bundle !" " A bundle !" replied the aunt; " who ever ſaid ſhe was a bundle ? I think no girl ever looks well that's taller than Eleanor ; they are always awkward." ' I wiſh ſhe would attend a little to the improvement of her mind,' returned her Ladyſhip, ' and leſs to dreſs and diſſipation. There's the Roman Hiſtory unopened, though I had taken the trouble to mark the moſt beautiful paſſages.' " I wiſh," interrupted Sir Marmaduke, " ſhe would attend a little to her expences ! Her bills laſt quarter ran ſhamefully high ; and I muſt and will have them lowered." ' I am ſure,' anſwered Mrs. Aſhford, ' ſhe had nothing but what was abſolutely neceſſary ; and ſurely, brother, you can now afford her a little

little more. Conſider, you have three thouſand pounds added to your income; beſides, probably, a conſiderable ſum of ready of money; for, as my mother has made no will, you know her perſonally will be divided between us.' "I rather believe," anſwered Sir Marmaduke, "that you will find the whole is mine. You have been lucky enough; for had not your father reſerved to himſelf the power of diſpoſing of the ſum ſettled upon younger children, according to his own pleaſure, your fortune would have been but half ſo large as it is." Caroline felt her colour heighten at theſe words: ſhe no longer wondered at the enmity her father had experienced from his family, ſince their intereſt and his were ſo directly in oppoſition. But her averſion to them all, Lady Aſhford excepted, in ſpite of herſelf, increaſing every hour, ſhe reſolved to ſpend but one more day among them, but to haſten back to her old retreat; where, in compariſon to her preſent ſituation, ſhe was perfectly happy.

Accordingly, at breakfaſt the next morning, ſhe informed Lady Aſhford, that ſhe intended to leave her about that hour the next day. Her Ladyſhip made ſome oppoſition to her deſign; and Mr. Aſhford proteſted againſt it with the utmoſt earneſtneſs:

neſs: but ſhe was ſteady to her purpoſe; and anticipated the comfort of quitting a ſociety, who ſeemed to think wrangling the principal uſe of converſation, and who were united together by no tie but that of conſanguinity. The generoſity of her grandmother had made her very rich; and ſhe was delighted with the thought of viſiting her old friends and dependents with a full purſe.

The moment breakfaſt was over, Mrs. Aſhford and her niece propoſed to each other a ſtroll in the ſhrubbery; and after a little conſultation about which walk they ſhould chuſe, aroſe and left the room; only aſking Mr. Aſhford, as they paſſed by him, if he would come along? To which he only anſwered by a ſhrug of his ſhoulders, and an expreſſive negative in his countenance.

A ſervant then appeared, to inform Sir Marmaduke that Mr. Alton, an eminent attorney in the neighbourhood, had juſt called at the door, and left a note for him; which, upon opening, he read with ſome ſurprize, that he had in his hands a will. made by the late Lady Aſhford, ſome little time before her death, which he was ready to produce, whenever Sir Marmaduke ſhould chuſe to have it read. This piece of information ſeemed not at all agreeable to the

the ſelfiſh Baronet; who now began to fear that there were ſharers in the treaſure he hoped wholly to poſſeſs. Mrs. Auſburn was the perſon he moſt feared; for he had no doubt of its having been made prior to her perſonal knowledge of Caroline. However, as it was proper that all her relations who were immediately upon the ſpot ſhould be preſent when it was read, he deſired Caroline to delay her journey till the funeral was over; and in a note to Mr. Alton, fixed the day after it for his attendence on that buſineſs.

Mr. Aſhford expreſſed the higheſt ſatisfaction in the proſpect of enjoying her company three days longer; and aſked if ſhe would allow him the pleaſure of attending her into ſome part of the grounds, the preſent cloudineſs of the morning being particularly ſuited to walking. Caroline politely inquired if Lady Aſhford would not favour them with her company? To which ſhe anſwered, that ſhe had entirely diſuſed herſelf to walking; and therefore requeſted they would leave her, without ceremony, as ſhe could always find in a book a delightful and improving companion.

Their walk was long and pleaſant: they converſed upon a variety of ſubjects in the moſt agreeable manner, among which ſome

family

family ones were introduced and diſcuſſed. Mr. Aſhford lamented the unfortunate diviſion which had ſo long ſubſiſted between the ſeveral parts of it; adding, that, as was the caſe in all domeſtic diſputes, reſentments had been carried to the moſt unreaſonable lengths, and the innocent and worthy became the ſufferers.

Caroline was much pleaſed with the candour and underſtanding of her couſin, and he was charmed with her beauty, ſweetneſs, and ſenſibility. Thus mutually ſatisfied with each other, they returned to the houſe; and he took care to renew the pleaſure he had enjoyed, by propoſing a ſtroll every morning and afternoon; to which, being fond of exerciſe, ſhe never objected. At other times, he was never from her ſide; and appeared to enjoy ſo much delight in her ſociety, that it would have raiſed the ſuſpicion and jealouſy of her uncle and his ſiſter, had ſhe been intended to remain long in the family: but as her ſtay was to be only three days, they let things take their own way; thinking no ſerious conſequences could be feared from ſo tranſitory an intimacy.

Thus paſſed the days, till the burial of the worthy old lady was over, and that arrived upon which her will was appointed

to

to be opened; for which purpoſe the whole family were aſſembled in Sir Marmaduke's library; every one, our heroine excepted, in high expectation of a handſome legacy. Sir Marmaduke thought that, as his mother had made a will, he muſt expect ſome deductions from what he conceived to be his natural right; but he had no doubt of finding the principal part bequeathed to him, as her heir and only ſon. She had always ſhewn great attention and kindneſs to Lady Aſhford, and therefore ſhe did not think it impoſſible but ſhe might be handſomely remembered. Mrs. Aſhford, as a daughter, who had devoted her whole life to her family, out of which ſhe had never been prevailed upon to tranſplant herſelf (though it was well known ſhe had been addreſſed by a German Count, and two Iriſh gentlemen of large fortune) thought ſhe had a right to every thing of which her mother died poſſeſſed; and could not help wondering at the mercenary unreaſonable temper of her brother, in thinking himſelf entitled to any ſhare. Miſs Aſhford hoped her grandmother would not quite forget her; eſpecially as ſhe knew that her father's cloſe temper occaſioned her often to want a number of little things which a young woman of faſhion ought to have. Two or three

thouſand

thouſand pounds would quite ſet her up; and ſhe ſhould be able next winter to equal the fineſt of them! As for Mr. Aſhford, he felt very indifferent about the matter: and Caroline, having no hope of advantage, would gladly have been excuſed from giving her attendance at ſo unintereſting a ceremony.

Such was the diſpoſition of mind in which each individual attended, while Mr. Alton peruſed the parchment which was to ſatisfy or diſappoint their hopes. He began with a legacy of one thouſand pounds to Mrs. Auſburn! at which Sir Marmaduke knit his brows, and Mrs. Aſhford drew up her head. Then followed ſmall bequeſts to all her ſervants, and ſeveral of her acquaintance, altogether amounting to another; at which the contraction became a perfect frown, and the bridle a toſs. Laſtly, all and every thing beſides, of which ſhe died poſſeſſed, ſhe bequeathed to her beloved grandaughter, Caroline Aſhford, as a ſmall proof of her maternal affection, and amends for the many injuries her father and herſelf had received from ſeveral of their relations.

Never was aſtoniſhment and diſappointment greater than that of the mercenary expectants! They gazed upon each other; upon Mr. Alton and Caroline, with looks

almoſt

almoſt of incredulity; nor was the object of their envy leſs amazed and confounded.

How long the ſilence might have laſted is difficult to affirm, had it not been broken by Mr. Aſhford; who, going up to his couſin, with pleaſure in his eyes, wiſhed her joy of her fortune; aſſuring her, that he was much better pleaſed with the diſpoſition his grandmother had made of it, than he ſhould have been had ſhe bequeathed it to himſelf.

It was ſome time before any other part of the family could prevail upon themſelves to follow his example. At length, Lady Aſhford paid her a kind of ſtiff congratulation; and Sir Marmaduke, reflecting that the thing was paſt recal, condeſcended to tell her that, as his mother had thought proper to put her and her fortune under his care, he ſhould conſider it as his duty to direct her in the beſt manner: and that he thought ſhe had for the preſent, till her affairs were properly regulated, better remain in his houſe. Caroline thanked him for the promiſe of his protection, and ſaid ſhe would in all things be ready to follow his advice.

Mrs. Aſhford and her niece made no attempt to conceal their chagrin and reſentment: and while Sir Marmaduke was

ſpeaking,

ſpeaking, left the room, with every mark of both. Caroline retired to her apartment; where a ſhower of tears, ſhed in grateful love to the memory of her to whom ſhe owed her preſent comfortable proſpects, was ſucceeded by fervent thanks to the Giver of all good; who can, in a moment, convert ſorrow to gladneſs; the tear of affliction into the ſmile of triumph.

CHAP. XXI.

A ſudden Journey.

NOtwithſtanding the diſlike with which our heroine was regarded by ſome part of her family, ſhe found her treatment much mended by the change in her circumſtances. She was no longer a poor dependent; one whoſe ſituation reproached the opulence of her relations. By the time every thing was properly diſpoſed of at Crayfort, and the legacies paid, ſhe found herſelf in poſſeſſion of upwards of eleven

eleven thouſand pounds, which, together with that in the hands of Doctor Steward, made a fortune, which, though far ſhort of the expectations ſhe had once entertained, was fully equal to her wiſhes. She ſettled the terms of her continuance in her uncle's houſe, in ſuch a manner, as to keep her free even from the ſhadow of obligation. It was agreed that ſhe ſhould pay two hundred pounds a year for the accommodation of herſelf, a woman ſervant, and a footman: in conſequence of which, a genteel apartment was aſſigned her; her books, harpſichord, &c. ſent for, together with the two pictures ſhe ſo highly valued; all the reſt of the family ones ſhe preſented to her uncle, only reſerving one of her grandmother, which, at the requeſt of Mr. Aſhford, had been taken by an eminent painter, about three years before her death. As for that of her grandfather, Sir Marmaduke, Mrs. Aſhton, and a long liſt of great aunts and uncles, ſhe moſt willingly parted with them all, and they were eſteemed by the Baronet a valuable preſent.

The three ſhe retained, where placed in her dreſſing-room; where, as at Elmwood, ſhe collected every thing that could afford amuſement to her retired hours, and in which ſhe regularly ſpent a part of every morning,

morning. This cuſtom was the greateſt comfort and relief to her; for though Mrs. and Miſs Aſhford began to treat her with rather more civility than when ſhe firſt came among them, their converſation, even when they wiſhed to be agreeable, was by no means ſuited to her taſte; and when otherwiſe, which was oftener the caſe, their inſolence was intolerable. She therefore made a practice, the moment a family wrangle was commenced, to leave the room, and ſeek more peaceable ſociety among her books; where, if ſhe ſometimes met with diſputes, they were carried on with ſome method and order, and her ear eſcaped the horrible diſſonance of Mrs. Aſhford's voice, which, when raiſed a little above its natural key, was, beyond meaſure, harſh and unpleaſant.

With her Ladyſhip ſhe every day became a greater favourite. She really poſſeſſed what Lady Aſhford wiſhed for, and eſteemed the firſt of all attainments, an extenſive knowledge of books: of this ſhe was ſo far from making any parade, that a perſon who had no taſte for reading, might be very frequently in her company before they ſuſpected her of having any; but ſhe never declined to ſpeak of them when ſhe converſed with any one with whom they were

a favou-

a favourite ſubject. She frequently took pains to explain paſſages to her, with which ſhe was more than uſually puzzled; and often, by a timely hint or aſſiſtance to her memory, would prevent her becoming an object of ridicule; and though Lady Aſhford had not ſenſibility ſufficient to guard her againſt expoſing the ignorance of which ſhe ought to have been conſcious, ſhe poſſeſſed enough to render her grateful for theſe little kindneſſes; and the obliging attentions of Caroline, which were the common and natural effects of her ſweetneſs of temper and diſpoſition, formed too ſtrong a contraſt to the inſolence of her ſiſter, and the careleſſneſs of her daughter, not to be remarked by her, and every one who viſited in the family.

Mr. Aſhford was conſtantly of his mother's parties, becauſe he was there more likely to find our heroine than with his aunt and ſiſter, who generally made a ſeparate one for themſelves. They had a few favourites in the neighbourhood, and were conſtantly rude to every other perſon who came to the houſe. Sometimes, if they were people of little conſequence, ſuch as the Rector and his wife, or the family of a country gentleman of ſmall fortune, they would never appear at all;

or if they did, ſcarce condeſcended to ſpeak, but in whiſpers to each other; whereas Caroline and Mr. Aſhford were the favourites of the whole country, and by their talents for converſation, rendered Aſhford Park far more cheerful and pleaſant than it had ever before been.

Every body began to foretell an attachment between the couſins, and to pronounce that they were made for each other. Mr. Aſhford was often told the opinion of the neighbourhood, and ſecretly wiſhed that the event might do credit to their diſcernment. Every day afforded him freſh occaſion of eſteem and admiration. Her heart was the temple of virtue; the graces had clothed it in ſo lovely an exterior, that every one who beheld it was, at leaſt for the moment, irreſiſtibly impelled to become her votary; and he who had always profeſſed himſelf of that number, then adored his divinity with double ardor. With ſuch a wife, ſuch a friend, and companion, how ſweetly would life glide away! how little ſhould he value the greatneſs, pomp, and pleaſures of which the world was ſo enamoured! His father, perhaps, might oppoſe his happineſs. What then? Why, he would follow the example of his uncle Henry, and be happy in ſpite of paternal tyranny.

tyranny. But was he ſure that he ſhould be equally fortunate? Would the charming object of his paſſion afford him the dear much wiſhed-for opportunity of ſacrificing prudence, cold, unfeeling prudence, to love? Of this he was doubtful, and this was his only doubt. He determined not to remain long under its tormenting preſſure, but to embrace the firſt opportunity of declaring the ſituation of his heart to the fair tyrant who enſlaved it.

His feelings, indeed, were a ſecret to none but her. Sir Marmaduke had again and again warned him againſt the folly of an imprudent marriage; and his aunt had given him the whole detail of Caroline's ill behaviour at Broomfield; adding, that Captain Weſt was not the only one ſhe uſed ſo ill; that Mr. Cravan, a man of the firſt fortune and conſequence, had met with the ſame treatment, and that ſhe was the verieſt coquet and jilt that ever deceived by falſe appearances. But all theſe warnings were vain; he treated them as the offſpring of malice, who is the never-failing attendant of envy, and capable of giving a dark hue to innocence itſelf.

An opportunity ſoon offered for the deſired purpoſe of opening his heart to her who ſo entirely poſſeſſed it. During a walk

walk upon a delightful morning, he introduced the ſubject of love. Caroline ſaid ſhe hoped ſhe never ſhould have any lovers; becauſe ſhe did not think her heart was at all formed for the entertainment of that paſſion. "If you would not inſpire love," replied Mr. Aſhford, "you muſt be leſs amiable, or converſe only with the ſtupid and inſenſible. But you will pardon me, if I cannot believe that a heart, ſuſceptible of every generous worthy ſenſation, can be incapable of admitting the perfection of them all: if ſo, happy had it been for your unfortunate friend if he had never enjoyed the dangerous pleaſure of beholding you! never had been flattered by your friendly ſmiles; which, while they warmed and delighted his heart, inſpired it with a paſſion the moſt tender and fervent. Yes, my dear couſin; the whole future happineſs of the man before you, depends upon the degree of eſtimation with which you honour him."

'If,' replied Caroline, 'my higheſt eſteem and warmeſt friendſhip can afford you the ſmalleſt ſatisfaction, be aſſured you entire poſſeſs them; but to more, you have already heard me declare, my heart is a ſtranger; and if I have any knowledge of its diſpoſition, will for ever remain ſo.'

Mr.

Mr. Aſhford uſed many arguments to perſuade her to admit his addreſſes; to permit him to hope that time, and his perſevering conſtancy and attention, might prevail upon her to alter a reſolution ſo unnatural, ſo prejudicial to her own happineſs, and ſo deſtructive of his; but ſhe abſolutely refuſed in future to liſten to any thing he might wiſh to ſay upon the ſubject; and intreated him to forget that he had ever thought of her in any light, except that of a friend: a character in which ſhe ſhould always be proud to be conſidered by him.

Grief and diſappointment were viſible in the countenance of Mr. Aſhford; and Caroline was extremely hurt to ſee a tear of mortified ſenſibility fall from his eye. She endeavoured to change the ſubject of converſation to ſomething amuſing and indifferent; but ſighs were the only anſwer he was capable of making: ſo that ſeeing how deeply he was diſtreſſed, ſhe forbore to increaſe his pain, by attempting to divert it; and they walked in ſilence to the houſe; where; the moment they entered, Mr. Aſhford retired to his chamber; and our heroince finding herſelf wholly unfit for company, diſpoſed of herſelf in the ſame manner.

Caroline was no ſooner alone than ſhe began to reflect upon the occurrence which had juſt happened; and could not help accuſing Fortune, who ſeemed to delight in perſecuting and diſturbing her repoſe. No ſooner was ſhe fixed and reconciled to one ſituation, than ſhe was obliged to relinquiſh it for a new one. She had no doubt but her uncle or Mrs. Aſhford would ſoon diſcover her couſin's partiality, and the conſequence would be her immediate removal from Aſhford Park. She was by no means attached to it, or its inhabitants; but there was ſomething diſreputable in being thus diſcarded, firſt by one family of her relations, and then by another: and though conſcious rectitude was the firſt object of her attention, ſhe by no means deſpiſed the good or bad opinion of the world, in which Providence had placed her; but, on the contrary, greatly deſired to preſerve the one and avoid the other. She loved her couſin as a brother: had ſhe conſidered him leſs in that light, he might perhaps have had more room to hope for a higher diſtinction in her heart. Perhaps, too, his reſemblance to her father, while it endeared him as a friend, in ſome degree prevented his good fortune as a lover. Upon the whole, ſhe felt it impoſſible to receive him in that character,

character, though ſhe knew nothing in him to which ſhe could reaſonably object, except the diſlike his father would expreſs to ſuch an union; and this ſhe believed would have been ſufficient, had her ſentiments in his favour been more tender. After much reflection, ſhe reſolved to leave Aſhford Park for ſome weeks, and pay a viſit to her good friends, the Doctor and Mrs. Seward, who, ſhe was certain, would receive her with joy: and during this abſence, ſhe hoped the good ſenſe of her couſin would enable him wholly to conquer a paſſion prejudicial to his intereſt, and unſupported by hope.

This reſolution, which ſhe determined to execute the very next day, ſoothed her mind, with the hope that no diſagreeable conſequence would happen from this unpleaſing affair; and ſhe ventured into the breakfaſt-room, though half-afraid to encounter the eyes of Mrs. Aſhford. Mr. Aſhford's ſervant appeared ſoon after her entrance, with his maſter's requeſt, that they would not wait for him, as he ſhould breakfaſt in his apartment. In a few minutes he returned, preſenting a letter to Lady Aſhford, which he ſaid was brought from London, by a ſpecial meſſenger. She immediately broke the ſeal, and peruſed it;

then giving it to Sir Marmaduke, "See here my dear," ſaid ſhe; "you will find that my uncle Harvey is very ill, and deſires to ſee me immediately." 'Oh, go by all means,' anſwered the Baronet: 'a few of his thouſands will ſuit me exactly: juſt at this time, I want to make a purchaſe; and he could not die at a better.' "You ſee," ſaid Lady Aſhford, "I ſhall be expected immediately." 'Well,' anſwered he, 'you had better ſet out this afternoon; ſleep upon the road, and get to London by dinner-time to-morrow.' "That will do very well," replied her Ladyſhip. "I ſuppoſe, Eleanor, you will have no objection to going along with me?" 'Dear mama,' anſwered Miſs Aſhford, 'how can you aſk me ſuch a thing? what could I poſſibly do in town at this ſeaſon? It would be quite ridiculous! I ſhould be aſhamed to put my head out of the coach-window, for fear of being ſeen.' "Sure, ſiſter," cried Mrs. Aſhford, "you are not in earneſt? Would you ſhut up Eleanor in the horrid duſt and heat of the city? I think your uncle lives in Biſhopſgate-ſtreet:—a very proper ſummer-reſidence for Miſs Aſhford, truly!" 'I fancy,' exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, 'ſhe will have no objection to city-money. By the heavens, the folly of women is without

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out bound or termination! What harm will the city air do her for three or four days?' "I ſhould not wonder," replied Mrs. Aſhford, "if it threw her into a fever. People who have been uſed to ſuch cloſe wretched places, may endure them well enough; but where there is the ſmalleſt delicacy——" 'If fat be a ſign of delicacy,' interrupted her brother, 'Eleanor may claim it: I know no other pretenſions ſhe has to make.'

"Pray, don't preſs her to go againſt her inclinations," cried Lady Aſhford; "ſhe will do nothing but grumble, and be out of temper the whole journey, if ſhe does. Beſides, I think I can procure a more agreeable companion; one who will venture herſelf into the city air, though ſhe has been no more accuſtomed to it than Miſs Aſhford. Will my dear Caroline," continued ſhe, turning to her, "favour me with her company?" 'I will attend you with pleaſure,' anſwered our heroine, bowing. "Then I ſhall have cauſe to thank Eleanor for her refuſal," cried her Ladyſhip: "however, when ſhe next wants an extra bill to be diſcharged, I may remember her preſent behaviour."

Breakfaſt was no ſooner over than Lady Aſhford and Caroline retired to their apartments,

ments, in order to give directions for their journey. At dinner-time Mr. Aſhford joined them: he appeared very grave; and though deſirous of concealing his chagrin, diſappointment and vexation were deeply characterized in every look. He ſpoke little; till hearing of his mother's intended journey, and by whom ſhe was to be accompanied, his countenance brightened up at once; and he told her he would certainly attend her. Sir Marmaduke and Mrs. Aſhford appeared alarmed, and oppoſed the meaſure ſtrongly. Their oppoſition, however, would have had very little effect, if a look from Caroline had not given him to underſtand that ſhe diſapproved his intention. It was with reluctance he ſubmitted even to her; to her only he could in this affair think of ſubmitting.

All things being in readineſs, Sir Marmaduke conducted his lady, Mr. Aſhford, and Caroline to the coach. Juſt as they got in, the former ſaid, he thought in their way back, they had better take the opportunity of calling upon Mrs. Murray: adding, "If you can bring me an account that ſhe is dead, and has left me half her eſtate, I ſhall not follow her with grief." When they were ſeated, and the carriage drove away, Lady Aſhford told our heroine that

that Mrs. Murray was a very old lady: that ſhe was firſt-couſin to the late Lady Aſhford, and worth at leaſt ſixty thouſand pounds. She added, That ſhe had ſeveral relations equally near, who were all ſtriving to ingratiate themſelves into her favour: That ſhe was a woman of a maſculine mind and manners, and rendered inſolent by the flattery of her relations, whom ſhe generally treated with the greateſt rudeneſs. She then informed her, that her uncle Harvey, who now lay ill, was likewiſe worth a large ſum of money: that he was a bachelor, who had gained his fortune in trade; from which he had been a few years retired: and having no relation ſo near as herſelf, ſhe had reaſon to believe every ſhilling of which he died poſſeſſed would be hers.

Their journey was ſafe and pleaſant. Upon the ſecond day, about noon, the great city appeared in view, of which our heroine had heard ſo much; and a little before three they were ſet down at the houſe of Mr. Harvey, in Biſhopſgate ſtreet.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXII.

A Fright.

LADY Aſhford found her relation very ill, though not in the immediate danger ſhe expected, and perhaps wiſhed. He expreſſed great joy upon ſeeing her; and requeſted that ſhe would ſtay with him till he was perfectly recovered, or the reverſe. In the latter caſe, he ſaid all his fortune and effects would be her own; and he wiſhed her to be upon the ſpot, in order to ſuperintend her own affairs, and take care of her intereſt.

The day after their arrival, Caroline told Lady Aſhford that ſhe had an uncle in London, the only brother of her mother; and that ſhe was reſolved, if poſſible, to find out where he lived. Her Ladyſhip aſked what he was in profeſſion? To which our heroine anſwered, that he was a ſoap-boiler. A Directory being then inquired for, they ſoon diſcovered that Saunders, Whitehouſe, and Glynn, ſoap-boilers, lived in Mincing-lane. Caroline was not greatly pleaſed

pleaſed with the name of the ſtreet in which his houſe ſtood; ſhe feared it did not ſpeak his circumſtances to be very good: "but if they are otherwiſe," ſaid ſhe, "I can afford to aſſiſt him, and will to the utmoſt of my power: it is the only reſpect I can now pay to the memory of my dear mother.

Lady Aſhford had requeſted that Caroline would make uſe of her coach in the ſame manner as if it was her own, and order it upon all occaſions, without ſcruple; for as ſhe ſhould go very little out, the horſes and ſervants would have nothing to do but attend upon her. Of this privilege ſhe availed herſelf, and directed the coachman to drive to Mincing-lane. They ſtopped at the number ſhe had mentioned; the outſide appearance of which gave our heroine no very pleaſing preſage of what ſhe ſhould find within. Upon aſking if Mr. Saunders was at home, ſhe was told that he was not; but that ſhe might ſee one of his partners. To which ſhe replied, That would not do; but if Mrs. Saunders was within, it would equally anſwer her purpoſe. "Oh, Ma'am," replied the man, "this is only the manufactory: Mr. Saunders lives in Ely Place, Holborn." Caro-

line

line thanked him for his information, and ordered the coach to Ely Place.

They ſtopped before an elegant-looking houſe, the door of which was opened by a ſervant in livery: and being informed that Mr. and Mrs. Saunders were both at home, ſhe alighted, and was ſhewn into a handſome parlour, where ſhe was told Mrs. Saunders would wait upon her immediately. In a few minutes entered a little fat fair woman, with great good humour in her countenance, who begged ſhe would be ſeated; and requeſted to know her commands. Caroline told her, ſhe had the honour of being nearly related to Mr. Saunders; that her name was Aſhford, and that, being in town upon buſineſs, ſhe could not excuſe herſelf from paying her duty to her uncle and his family. "Oh," cried Mrs. Saunders, "I have heard my huſband ſpeak of his ſiſter, who married the ſon of a very great gentleman; for which he was diſherited. My huſband ſays, ſhe was as fine a creature as ever eyes were laid upon; but that ſhe never looked up afterwards; but a few years after her marriage ſhe died of a broken heart." 'My uncle has been miſinformed, Madam,' anſwered Caroline: 'my mother and father lived in the happieſt manner, till my unhappy

happy birth put an end to the life of the former; but the great diſtance at which ſhe lived, and no correſpondence being kept up between them after the death of my grandfather, Saunders, eaſily accounts for ſuch errors.' "And ſo you are her daughter," cried, Mrs. Saunders. "Well, my huſband will be right glad to ſee you; for he has often wiſhed to know what family your mother left behind her, and how they were provided for: it was not always ſo well with him as it is now. Since his marriage with me, he can afford to live himſelf and help others: and many is the one that he hath helped. Yes, yes; my firſt huſband left a fine buſineſs behind him; and between that and the alley, he turns a pretty ſum in the year. There are not many warmer men between Temple Bar and the Royal Exchange."

Caroline aſſured her, that ſhe felt the ſincereſt pleaſure in this account of their proſperity; of which ſhe wiſhed them a daily increaſe. Juſt as ſhe ſoke theſe words, the door opened, and a tall handſome man, of about forty, made his appearance. "Look here, my dear," cried his wife; "here is your ſiſter's daughter, Miſs Aſhton." 'You need not tell me ſo,' anſwered Mr. Saunders; ſhe is her very picture.

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I am glad to ſee you, my dear. But whoſe coach is that at the door with a bloody hand upon it? no faſhionable doings I hope?' "That coach, Sir,' anſwered Caroline, "belongs to my uncle Sir Marmaduke Aſhton, in whoſe family I now live." 'That's well,' ſaid Mr. Saunders, embracing her with affection. 'Be your ſituation what it will, if you are a good girl, I am heartly glad to ſee you. Pardon my ſuſpicions, my dear,' continued he, 'ſuch faces as yours are not ſeen every day; and our great folks are upon the watch for the deſtruction of beauty and innocence. But where is Charlotte? Does ſhe know that her couſin is here?' At theſe words he rang a bell; and a footman appearing, ordered him to tell Charlotte he wanted her immediately "Her muſic-maſter is at preſent with her, Sir," ſaid the man. 'No matter,' replied his maſter; 'tell her I want her.'

Chocolate now was brought in; and while our heroine was drinking a diſh of chocolate, Miſs Charlotte entered. She was a handſome-looking girl, good ſhape, and her features open and agreeable; but there was a boldneſs, a certain ſaucineſs diffuſed over her whole appearance, which diſguſted a delicate and ſenſible mind.

"Lord,

"Lord, papa," ſaid ſhe, without obſerving any perſon was in the room, "how could you call me away in the middle of a leſſon? You complain that I don't come on, how ſhould I, when you won't let me mind it?" 'I ſent for you,' replied her father, 'to ſee your couſin, Miſs Aſhford, who has been ſo good as to call upon us.' "Yes, my dear" cried Mrs. Saunders, "that young lady is your couſin, the daughter of your father's handſome ſiſter, of whom we have often heard him ſpeak; and he ſays, ſhe is ſo like her, that he ſhould have known her, if he had never heard her name."

Caroline now advanced towards her couſin, who courteſied, and ſaid ſhe was very glad to ſee her in London; to which compliment our heroine replied, ſhe was happy in an opportunity of becoming acquainted with ſuch near relations, to whom ſhe had long greatly wiſhed to be known. "That's very obliging," anſwered Mrs. Saunders, "and I am ſure we are very glad of the pleaſure of your company. and ſhall be happy if you will come and be with us as long as you ſtay in town." 'Yes,' rejoined her huſband; 'if you will come and ſpend a few weeks with us, we will take you about a little, and make it as

pleaſant

pleaſant as we can.' "Oh! pray do come, couſin," exclaim'd Charlotte, "and then my papa will let one go out a little. Do you know I have been only twice at Ranelagh, and once at Vauxhall, this ſummer! and we haven't ſeen the inſide of the Little Theatre ſince it was opened, though Mrs. Alderman Perks offered to take me every night; and no body has genteeler parties, which my papa very well knows: but if you will come, he can't refuſe our going every where. Pray do come!" Caroline thanked them for their kind invitations, but excuſed herſelf, on account of Lady Aſhford, who ſhe ſaid it was impoſſible for her to leave; but ſhe promiſed often to ſee them during her ſtay in town. She then received an invitation to dine with them the next day, of which ſhe readily accepted; and, taking leave in the moſt friendly manner, ordered the ſervants home.

It was a great and unexpected pleaſure to our heroine, to find her maternal relations in ſuch happy circumſtances; and the ſatisfaction was greater, from her expecting the reverſe. She was much pleaſed with the appearance of her uncle: and the love he bore the memory of her mother, made her willing to overlook and excuſe the little

tle defects ſhe had obſerved in his wife and daughter, which ſhe thought originated rather from want of information, than any thing wrong in the heart, or materially in the head. While ſhe was buſily amuſed with theſe reflections, the horſes, which were wholly unuſed to the hurry of a great city, ſuddenly took fright, and running full againſt a poſt which ſtood at the corner of a ſmall ſtreet, tore off one of the wheels, and threw the coachman from his box. They were galloping along at full ſpeed, amidſt the cries of a multitude of people, and our heroine every moment expecting to be daſhed in pieces, when a gentleman, who was coming in an oppoſite direction, with a courage and ſtrength which aſtoniſhed every one, catched violently hold of the reins of one of the horſes, and, plucking him ſuddenly on one ſide, ſtopped their dreadful career: the mob flying inſtantly to his aſſiſtance, the furious animals were ſecured from the danger of further miſchief. The gentleman then flew to the door of the coach, in order to ſee who his reſolution and bravery had reſcued; where he beheld the lovely Caroline all pale and breathleſs, ſunk to the bottom. He inſtantly bore her in his arms to a large ſilverſmith's ſhop, the maſter of which, and

his

his wife, having beheld the whole affair, readily conducted him into a back parlour, where they did every thing that could contribute to her recovery.

In a ſhort time ſhe opened her eyes; and the blood began to reviſit her face, which, when perfect ſenſibility returned, ruſhed there in unuſual quantities, upon beholding herſelf ſupported in the arms of a ſtranger. She clearly recollected every thing that had paſſed; and gently withdrawing her hand from his preſſure, "Is it to you, Sir," ſaid ſhe, "that I am obliged for my eſcape "from ſo dreadful a death?" 'Faith,' cried the maſter of the houſe, 'it was an eſcape, indeed! I believe this gentleman may boaſt of an act which no other man in London would venture to do. How you came off, Sir, without being killed on the ſpot, I cannot imagine!' "Are you hurt, Sir?" exclaimed Caroline. "I hope not: I ſhall never be happy, if you ſuffer by your humanity." 'I don't know,' replied the gentleman, half-ſmiling; 'I believe I am a little.' "Bleſs me! where?" cried the affrighted Caroline. "Do, ſend for a ſurgeon! Is it your arm?" 'Do not be alarmed, my dear Madam; I need no ſurgeon,' ſaid the gentleman: 'as ſoon as you find yourſelf able to remove, I will have the

the pleaſure of conducting you ſafe home.' At theſe words, Caroline aroſe, and, finding herſelf perfectly recovered, ſaid ſhe was ready to go; and aſked if the coach was waiting? The maſter of the houſe told her that it was too much damaged to be fit for preſent uſe: that the ſervants had taken it home; and her footman ſaid he would be back immediately, but was not yet come. The gentleman then begged ſhe would truſt herſelf to his care; which he ſaid he ſhould eſteem the higheſt compliment he could poſſibly receive: and, as ſhe made no objection, ſent for a hackney-coach, into which, after thanking the people of the houſe for their civility, he handed her; and, at her deſire, directed it to be drove to Ely Place; ſhe chooſing that, as being nearer, and which rendered her choice neceſſary, not being able at that moment to recollect the name of Biſhopgate-ſtreet.

The family were much ſurprized and alarmed, by ſeeing her return in ſo different a vehicle; and expreſſed much joy at her eſcape. Mrs. Saunders ſaid it was a wonderful deliverance indeed! and that the leaſt ſhe could do was, to give her heart to the gentleman, in return for his bravery. The cheek of our heroine was crimſoned over by this ſpeech; and the

ſtranger

ſtranger obſerving her diſtreſs, inſtantly removed his eyes from her face, and replied, that it was impoſſible to expreſs the happineſs he felt at having been the means of ſafety to ſo charming a lady; and that, however long or happy his life might be, he ſhould always number that among his moſt fortunate days. Upon his riſing to take leave, he reſpectfully begged that he might be permitted to call and inquire after her health the next morning; ſaying, that however well ſhe now appeared to be, he could not help dreading the effects of ſuch a fright, upon a frame and mind ſo apparently delicate. To which Mrs. Saunders replied, by inviting him to dine with them the next day; ſaying, ſhe thought they could not ſhew too much reſpect to a perſon who had ſaved the life of their couſin; eſpecially as it was eaſy to ſee that he was a gentleman, whoſe acquaintance would do them honour. The ſtranger thanked her in the moſt polite and grateful manner, and, promiſing to attend them the next day, took his leave.

He was no ſooner gone than Charlotte exclaimed, "I'm glad he comes to-morrow; for I never ſaw ſo handſome a man in my whole life! Don't you think him very handſome, couſin?" 'I really do not know'

know,' replied Caroline, with an affected indifference; 'I took but little notice of his perſon; but his gallantry and courage I never ought to forget.'—"Well," anſwered Charlotte, "I wiſh with all my heart I had been in your place. What eyes he has! and how charmingly he ſmiles! I am ſure you have made a conqueſt of him. If you had ſeen how he ſeemed to admire you, and what a look he gave you at parting! But you did ſee that; for you coloured as red as ſcarlet!" 'Sure you miſtake,' cried Caroline, the blood again diffuſing itſelf over her cheeks: 'yet, ought not my looks and words expreſs my gratitude for ſuch a ſervice?' "To be ſure they ought," replied Mrs. Saunders. "I don't think you coloured a bit too much: and I am ſure, if I can believe eyes, the gentleman thought ſo too; for I'll be ſworn, his ſparkled with joy."

While they were thus converſing, a coach, attended by Caroline's footman, drove up to the door. In it was Lady Aſhford's woman; whom ſhe had ſent to conduct her back, being afraid ſhe would not like to come alone, after ſuch a fright, the ſervants having related the accident which had happened.

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Our heroine having therefore again taken leave of her relations, and renewed her promiſe of being with them the next day, once more ſet out for Biſhopſgate-ſtreet; where ſhe arrived without further accident.

CHAP. IV.

A Fracas.

THE moment breakfaſt was over, our heroine retired to her apartment, and began to look over her clothes, in order to ſelect a dreſs for the day: She had brought but few with her: none of them pleaſed her. There was not time to procure new ones; ſhe wiſhed ſhe had brought greater choice; an elegant cap and hat might be had, and ſhe reſolved to ſend Kitty for them. But how could ſhe truſt to her taſte? She would go herſelf. No, that would not do, ſhe ſhould not then have time to get her hair properly dreſſed; for ſhe was to dine exactly at four. It was at length reſolved that John ſhould order a milliner to ſend a number for her to look at. This being ſettled, and a gown put in readineſs, ſhe

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ſat down to have her hair dreſſed. Kitty found her unuſually exact; ſhe always dreſſed with great taſte, but to-day ſhe was ſcarce to be ſatisfied; one curl dropped too low, another was ſtiff; and though her head looked uncommonly well, ſhe could hardly be perſuaded that it was not frightful.

When the milliner arrived ſhe tried firſt one cap and hat, then another; at laſt ſhe fixed her choice; and having directed the white plume, with which was it ornamented, to be placed a little different, when her dreſs was completed, ſhe looked elegance and beauty itſelf. Never did a birth-night belle look in her glaſs with more attention and anxiety, till unable to find any more faults, ſhe was forced to be content; and the coach being ready, with job horſes (Lady Aſhford reſolving not to uſe her own again during her ſtay in town) ſhe drove to Ely Place.

It was not more than half an hour paſt three when ſhe arrived; but ſhe had promiſed to come early, and wiſhed to be there before the ſtranger, upon whom her thoughts were every moment involuntarily turning. She was taken up ſtairs to a handſome drawing-room, where every thing that money, without much taſte, could ſupply, was ſeen in profuſion. A moment after, Charlotte entered

entered: ſhe was in a ſummer half-dreſs, made, trimmed, and put on in the very extreme of the faſhion. "Dear me," cried ſhe, coming up to Caroline, "how ſweetly you are dreſſed! but why don't you put on your hat more on one ſide? Don't that plume hang lower than they wear them?" 'I like to dreſs a little like other people," anſwered Caroline; 'but I do not think it neceſſary to adopt all their whims and abſurdities, or entirely to give up my own taſte. In ſhort, my dear,' continued ſhe, ſmiling, 'I like to have a few follies of my own, and not conſtantly to follow thoſe of other people.' "Well," returned Charlotte, "ſo I am but in the faſhion I don't care; if things are ugly it is the fault of the faſhion-makers, not mine." 'Very true,' anſwered Caroline, ſmiling, 'it is a method which certainly ſaves you much trouble.' Juſt as ſhe pronounced theſe words the door opened; her heart fluttered; but it was not the ſtranger, it was Mrs. Alderman Perks and her daughter.

After many compliments, and much ceremony, they were ſeated; and being joined by Mrs. Saunders, inquiry was mutually made after their huſbands. Mrs. Perks aſſured her friend, that the Alderman fully intended himſelf the pleaſure of dining with

Mr.

Mr. Saunders; but a Court being that day held, he was obliged to attend, and hoped they would have the goodneſs to excuſe him. She then turned to Charlotte, crying, 'Well, my dear, and how do you do? Why don't you let her come a little more among us, Mrs Saunders? We were laſt night at Hughes's. Upon my word, his exhibition is very entertaining; we ſaw Chilliby, the wild horſe, rode. Sir Timy-Glymp was there and his lady, and the three Miſs Glymps, and Mr. Clare of Bond-ſtreet, who is, they ſay a humble ſervant to Miſs Molly. We were the moſt comfortable party you can imagine, and were very well amuſed indeed.' "Well," cried Charlotte, "I long to ſee Chilliby rode, of all things, and ſo my mama and papa know very well, and yet they never will let me go; but they hate for me to go any where." 'Upon my word, Mrs. Saunders,' anſwered Mrs. Perks, 'you ſhould let her go out a little more, it does young people good to ſee the world, and the manner of genteel places. Let her come with us to Sadler's Wells on Monday; we have taken two boxes, and ſhall be quite ſnug.' "I can make no promiſe without her father's conſent," anſwered Mrs. Saunders, "if I do, he'll be ſure to unſay all the

the agreement. If he likes for her to go, I never makes any objections when ſhe is in proper company, that's all I cares about. Let her go in proper company, and go every day in the year, with all my heart."

Charlotte was about to reply, when the door was opened again, and Mr. Rivers was announced. As the name was ſtrange to all preſent, a momentary ſuſpence took place; but it was quickly put an end to by the entrance of Caroline's preſerver. The flutter ſhe had felt before now returned with double violence; and ſhe was ſo much agitated by his appearance, that it was with difficulty ſhe could anſwer his tender and reſpectful inquiries about her health, or renew her thanks for the life ſhe owed him. Her confuſion, however, wearing off by degrees, ſhe entered into that eaſy kind of chat, partly made up of trifles, and party of ſenſe and information, which ſhe was ſo remarkably qualified to ſupport, and in which ſhe found Mr. Rivers excelled any man ſhe had ever converſed with. At dinner he placed himſelf next to her; but his attention was not ſo utterly ingroſſed by her as to prevent his treating every one preſent with politeneſs, and the young ladies with what a common obſerver would have ſtyled a

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greater degree of gallantry than he ſhewed to our heroine; though it was eaſy for one of more penetration to perceive, that ſhe was his principal object. The attention he paid to all ſhe ſaid was greater: he was more careful of what he addreſſed to her: and above all, his eyes ſpoke an admiration which rendered words perfectly unneceſſary.

Nor was Caroline, on her part, leſs pleaſed and intereſted than himſelf. The gratitude ſhe owed him gave a licence to her eſteem, to her admiration. And how ſlight the diſtinction is between theſe united and Love, I leave to the caſuiſts in that paſſion to determine. She found in Mr. Rivers that ſomething which ſhe had in vain ſought in all others; that mixture of eaſe and reſpect, of tenderneſs and ſpirit, which, in her eſtimation, conſtituted the finiſhed character. Short as had been their acquaintance, ſhe had experienced, in her own perſon, that he poſſeſſed two of the nobleſt qualities that can adorn the human heart,—Courage and Humanity: qualities with which vice is almoſt incomparible. His manners were inexpreſſibly pleaſing: he was well informed: ſhe had no doubt but he was learned and accompliſhed. His ſentiments were manly and generous: and laſt, perhaps not

leaſt, his perſon was remarkably graceful; and his face poſſeſſed a ſhare of maſculine beauty not often to be met with.

After dinner Mrs. Perks propoſed their going to Vauxall. Caroline would have preferred the theatre: but every one appearing pleaſed, ſhe only requeſted Mrs. Saunders to permit her to ſend a note to Biſhopgate-ſtreet, to let the family know that ſhe ſhould not be at home, having been prevailed upon to ſtay at her uncle's all night; which done, and an early diſh of tea being ordered, ſoon after eight Mrs. Perks's coach drove to the door, which was followed by Mr. Saunders's: and the whole party ſet off in the higheſt good-humour to this ſcene of general amuſement. There were no gentlemen attendants but Mr. Saunders and Mr. Rivers: and Mrs. Saunders told Caroline, in a half-whiſper, that Mrs. Perks was remarkable for propoſing parties of pleaſure when her huſband was abſent; by which means ſhe and her daughter eſcaped free of all expence; and that, tho' they were conſtantly in public places, ſhe did not believe it coſt them five guineas in diverſions the whole year round.

The lights, the muſic, and the gay happy appearance of every one around her, gave Caroline, upon her firſt entrance, a

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ſenſible pleaſure; but ſhe ſoon perceived a mixture of company and manners which diſguſted her. She had none of that pride which ſtands aloof, and turns from thoſe whom Nature made equal, with ſcorn and deriſion. She could deſcend to poverty, and even ruſticity, without feeling that ſhe had merit in ſo doing: but vulgar merriment and finery were what ſhe loathed to mix with; and there was too much appearance of that kind, to permit the place to afford her much pleaſure.

Among thoſe who appeared to figure as the principal bucks of the night, one party rendered themſelves particularly conſpicuous. They talked louder, ſwore faſter, looked fiercer, and ſtared more confidently than any in the gardens. Every time they paſſed, Caroline, from a natural averſion to ſuch kind of beings, had turned aſide her face; and Mr. Rivers obſerving her fear, had conſtantly put himſelf between her and the enemy. At laſt, however, one who ſeemed to be a principle leader of the band, coming cloſe up to our heroine, and looking under her hat, exclaimed, "By Heaven, it is her! It is Miſs Aſhford herſelf! This is an unlooked for felicity!"

Caroline inſtantly recollected the voice of Captain Weſt, and, recovering a little

from her fright, received a torrent of compliments, and ſuch kind of extravagant fine things as he was remarkable for ſaying. It was eaſy to perceive that he was in a ſtate of half-intoxication; and ſhe could not but eſteem him a diſgraceful acquaintance; but it was impoſſible to get rid of him. He inſiſted upon being her eſcort for the evening; ſaying, with a fierce look, that he believed no man in the gardens could pretend a greater right to that honour; and if any ſuch would come forward, he was ready to anſwer them, and let them know that he was a gentleman, and would act as ſuch, be they what they would. Theſe words he addreſſed full to Mr. Rivers; who at firſt, ſeeing Caroline acknowledge him as an acquaintance, drawn back, and, to her no ſmall mortification, reſigned her, as it were, to ſuperior pretenſions; but now obſerving her diſtreſs, he again advanced, and told Captain Weſt he was not entitled to inquire the cauſe of a preference which that lady might think proper to favour any other with: but he would defend her from inſult, though a prince ſhould offer it; and would chaſtiſe upon the ſpot any man who ſhould ſo far forget what belongs to his character, as to give her the ſmalleſt diſturbance. "And

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who are you?" cried Weſt, "who ſo valiantly ſet up for her defender?" 'Sir, I am her old acquaintance, her old friend, her old lover, Sir; what do you ſay to that?'. "If the lady admits your claims, Sir, I have nothing to ſay," anſwered Mr. Rivers. 'What! What is all this about?' exclaimed Mr. Saunders, interpoſing, 'I know no claim either of you have to my niece. What the devil! are we to be made the gaze of the whole gardens, becauſe a couple of hot-headed young fellows don't know what they would be at? Nay, you need not look fierce, I ſhan't fight either of you: I ſhall only take the liberty of conducting the girl ſafe out of your reach. Come, Miſtreſs, bring your charge,' continued he, addreſſing his wife; 'I warrant I'll reſcue them both from the preſent danger,' So ſaying, he took the arm of the trembling Caroline under his, and, followed by the reſt of the party, quitted the gardens unmoleſted.

They were no ſooner in the coach (each family going in their own, ſeparate roads) than Charlotte began to grumble at her father, for bringing them home ſo ſoon. She ſaid he might eaſily have put an end to the quarrel without leaving the gardens: that ſhe did not ſee why both the gentlemen might

might not have ſupped with them; for the Captain ſeemed a charming man; only a little too warm. "Thy ideas of men," replied her father, "will never extend beyond the lace upon their coats, and the powder on their heads! But obſerve me: I'll have no more Vauxhall; a place only fit for young rakes to ſtare at modeſt girls, till they become as impudent as themſelves. For your part. Miſs, I ſee their ſtares give you no concern; you can ſtand and almoſt return them." 'Lord, papa!' cried Charlotte, 'you'd have one like a country milk-maid, bluſhing at every man who looks at one. Truly, one ſhould have enough to do in London.

Poor Caroline was too deeply mortified to be able to utter a ſyllable: Nothing could have happened more unfortunately. She had probably loſt the good opinion of the only man ſhe ever ſaw, relatives excepted, whoſe good opinion ſhe was anxious to obtain. No doubt he muſt deſpiſe her; deſpiſe her too much ever to give her an opportunity of clearing herſelf. The vexation ſhe endured was far more painful than any ſhe had ever before experienced; and ſhe felt a diſlike to Captain Weſt, little ſhort of averſions. This unpleaſing train of reflections effectually baniſhed ſleep. She

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aroſe without having cloſed her eyes; and the moment breakfaſt was over, requeſted that a hackney-coach might be ſent for: and one of her uncle's ſervants attending her, ſhe returned once more to the houſe of Mr. Harvey.

Finding that Lady Aſhford was in her chamber, ſhe went to it, and, knocking gently, was let in by her woman; who told her that her lady had a bad headach, and was laid down upon the bed. She therefore took up a book which her aunt had been reading, and waited in the room till ſhe awoke. As ſoon as ſhe raiſed her head, ſeeing our heroine, ſhe told her ſhe was glad to ſee her again: that if ſhe had not returned that morning, ſhe intended to have written to let her know it was her intention to leave London the next day; the heat and cloſeneſs of it being very hurtful to her health; and her uncle ſo far recovered, as no longer to ſtand in need of her attendance. Caroline readily agreed to accompany her; ſaying, with a ſigh, that ſhe believed the air of London was indeed infectious. Orders were accordingly given for their leaving town the next morning; and in the afternoon ſhe returned once more to Ely Place, to bid adieu to her relations there. They all appeared extremely ſorry to part with her; and preſſed her much to let her

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aunt return alone, and ſpend a few weeks with them. She was once upon the point of accepting their invitation, as the only poſſible means of ever again ſeeing Mr. Rivers; of clearing up the ſeeming myſtery or impropriety of her conduct; yet, recollecting how ungenteel her behaviour to Lady Aſhford would be, in ſuffering her to travel alone, when the profeſſed purpoſe of her journey was to accompany her; and ſenſible that ſhe ought rather to combat than encourage a paſſion for a man, to whoſe family, connections, and real character in life ſhe was an entire ſtranger; ſummoning at once all her reſolution, ſhe bade them adieu, and returned to Biſhopſgate-ſtreet; from whence, early the next morning, they ſet out upon their way to Aſhford Park.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXIV.

The Dependents.

I HAVE before mentioned, that it was Lady Aſhford's intention to make a ſhort viſit to Mrs. Murray, a rich relation of her late mother-in-law's. She accordingly gave orders to drive to her houſe, which was rather more than five miles from the main road. Upon their arrival, her Ladyſhip deſired a ſervant, who attended at the gate, to let his lady know ſhe was there, and begged the favour of being permitted to ſee her. This meſſage, which was received in a ſurly impertinent manner (the fellow ſaying he did not ſuppoſe his lady would let her come in) was taken up ſtairs; and after they had waited at leaſt a quarter of an hour, he returned, telling them they might alight, if they pleaſed; and if his lady found herſelf well enough by and by, ſhe would ſee them. This permiſſion, almoſt unhoped for, was received

by Lady Aſhford in the moſt gracious manner: and ſhe followed him into the houſe with as much alacrity as if ſhe had been going to take poſſeſſion of it. They were ſhewn into a large parlour, almoſt unfurniſhed. Mrs. Murray not having quitted her chamber for many years, the lower part of the houſe was of courſe expoſed to the depradations of her ſervants, who had pretty nearly ſtripped every part of it. She was wholly governed by her houſekeeper and butler, who were huſband and wife; and ruled her in every thing, ſo far as the natural ſuſpiciouſneſs and obſtinacy of her temper rendered her manageable. Here they waited till any patience, except that of a dependent, would have been exhauſted; but Lady Aſhford felt herſelf quite in that predicament (for ſhe was not wholly free from her huſband's foible, covetouſneſs) and therefore uttered not a word expreſſive of impatience, till a full hour had eſcaped, when the door was opened by the houſekeeper; who informed her, with ſome ſhortneſs, that her lady was ready to ſee them, "And how do you do, Mrs. Broome?" ſaid Lady Aſhford, with great condeſcenſion. "How does your huſband and family do? I expected to have ſeen you at Aſhford Park before this time: I thought

thought the laſt time I was here, you promiſed to come." Mrs. Broome thanked her with rather more complaiſance than ſhe had uſed in ſpeaking to her before; but ſaid ſhe was greatly confined; for her lady thought well of nothing but what ſhe did; and ſhe could hardly get out three days in the year. "Upon my word," anſwered her Ladyſhip, "that's ſomewhat hard: I think you ought to go out a little for the ſake of your health. I ſhall deſire my aunt to part with you for a few days; and then you muſt come, and bring one or two of your children; the change of air will do them good.

By this time they were arrived at the chamber-door; which Mrs. Broome opening, deſired them to walk in. Mrs. Murray was ſitting in a large eaſy-chair, with her foot, which was violently ſwelled by the gout, reſting upon a covered ſtool. She was muffled up with flannel, from head to foot; and being a maſculine figure, with hard features and a dark beard, made a moſt forbidding appearance. Though the day was one of the warmeſt in July, there was a fire in the grate; and upon the ſides of the Bath-ſtove ſtood ſeveral ſaucepans; and a ſmall table, which was placed before her, was covered with various meſſes, which

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ſhe choſe to have cooked under her own inſpection. Before the fire lay a large female ſpaniel; and in one corner of the room was a piece of old carpeting, which three of her young ones were ſleeping upon. The windows, not being ever permitted to be opened for the admiſſion of freſh air, the cloſeneſs of the chamber, out of which its principal inhabitants never moved, was almoſt intolerable.

Lady Aſhford approached her rich relation with all the reſpect that ſhe could have paid to an empreſs; telling her, that it was ſo long ſince ſhe had heard from her, that Sir Marmaduke and herſelf began to grow uneaſy; and ſhe had reſolved to make perſonal inquiries after her health, as being more ſatisfactory than any other. "Well," replied Mrs. Murray, "I am here yet, and here likely to be. I ſuppoſe you was in hopes to find that I was upon the point of ſlipping off? And faith, if that was the caſe, I don't believe, with all your ſpeeches, that one among you would lend a finger to keep me up." 'I am ſorry,' replied Lady Aſhford, 'that you ſhould have ſo bad an opinion of us as to think we could wiſh to loſe ſo valuable a relation and friend. What can make one amends for the loſs of a friend? Not all the wealth they can poſſibly

poſſibly leave one.' "As for friends," replied Mrs. Murray, "I believe money is the beſt in the world; and if I was not poſſeſſed of a little, neither Sir Marmaduke nor yourſelf would trouble your heads about me. As it is, I don't doubt but you'd be both glad to ſee me potted." 'I am ſure,' cried Lady Aſhford, without betraying the leaſt ſigns of impatience or reſentment, 'my dear aunt cannot think ſo ill of her relations. People indeed who ſpend all before them, and can never get enough to ſupply their extravagancies, may become ſuch wretches; but that is not the caſe with Sir Marmaduke, he always lived within his income, and need not wiſh the death of any body.' "I am glad of it," anſwered Mrs. Murray; "then he needs the leſs from me: I hate to give to them that have too much already." 'I did not mean to ſay,' rejoined her Ladyſhip, 'that Sir Marmaduke's income was large: on the contrary, he is often diſtreſſed for money, and has younger children to provide for: and I ſhould think, a perſon of my dear aunt's prudence and underſtanding, would wiſh to leave her fortune where it will be well uſed, and not thrown away upon miſtreſſes, gaming-tables, and ſuch kind of faſhionable methods.' "I am not going

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to leave it to any body," anſwered Mrs. Murray; "and ſo you may all make yourſelves eaſy upon that head. I may very likely marry, one of theſe days, and diſappoint you all. Which of you, I wonder, will come after me when I have got a flock of children running about the houſe? I warrant 'dear aunt,' and 'good Madam' will be changed into 'old fool.' What ſay you, young woman?" continued ſhe, addreſſing Caroline; "would it not be ſerving them as they deſerve?" 'I think, Madam, you have a right to conſult your own happineſs,' replied Caroline. "Well ſaid!" anſwered the old lady; "if you are rich, child, get married, and have a family of your own, or elſe you ſee what will be your lot: all your relations will gape round you, as if they could get no breath till you loſt yours: and, if you don't take care, it's ten to one but they grow impatient, and pot you before your time!"

Caroline could not help ſmiling at this repreſentation; the truth of which ſhe in ſome degree witneſſed. Lady Aſhford, in order to give a change to the diſcourſe, was beginning to inquire if ſhe had much pain from her foot? and was prepared to rejoice or lament, according to the account ſhe received, when Mrs. Broome made her appearance,

appearance, and told her lady that a fine young gentleman was at the door, in a beautiful vis-a-vis; who ſaid he was one of her near relations, and begged to be permitted to pay his duty to her. "What! more relations!" exclaimed the old lady: "I ſhall be aſſaſſinated! Bid him get about his buſineſs; I want none of his duty." 'Nay, Ma'am,' cried Broome, 'he ſays he has come a great way, on purpoſe to have the honour of ſeeing you; and he knows by the coach, that ſtands by the gate, that you have company with you. Do, let him come up; you can't think how handſome he is.' "Well," replied her miſtreſs, "he may come if he will; ſince I am to be plagued, it's as well have all as ſome." The houſe-keeper immediately went down ſtairs, and in a few moments returned to open the door, as ſhe had done for Lady Aſhford, when who ſhould enter but Caroline's Bath admirer, Lord Danby. He ſtarted upon ſeeing our heroine, but inſtantly recovering himſelf, went up to Mrs. Murray, and in the moſt gallant and reſpectful ſtyle, thanked her for the honour ſhe had done him, in admitting him into her preſence, and aſſured her that he had long panted for the happineſs he now enjoyed. 'And pray who may you be, who

have

have ſo vaſt a regard for me?' aſked Mrs. Murray; 'tis amazing how I inſpire people with ſo much love and reſpect, before they have ever ſeen me!' His Lordſhip apologized for the ſoleciſm, in etiquette, of which he had been guilty; and having informed her of his name, and the degree of relationſhip to her, in which he had the happineſs to ſtand, begged ſhe would in future give him leave to number himſelf among thoſe whom ſhe honoured with her friendſhip.

He then turned to Lady Aſhford, with whom he was not acquainted, and bowed in reſpectful ſilence. Paſſing from her to Caroline, "Need I expreſs the pleaſure I feel at this unexpected happineſs," cried he: "where have you concealed yourſelf ſo long? I quitted Bath in a week after you; there was nothing left that could detain me. I hope you had an agreeable winter in town?" 'I ſpent the whole of laſt winter in Weſtmoreland,' anſwered Caroline. "Then my loſs was not ſo great as I imagined," replied his Lordſhip. "I was abſolutely forced into a party to the ſouth of France, which obliged me to abandon the hope of meeting you in London, and I now lived upon that of ſeeing you next ſeaſon." 'And ſo you are a Lord,' interrupted

interrupted Mrs. Murray. 'Are you rich?" "That is a queſtion, my dear madam," anſwered his Lordſhip," not very eaſily anſwered. In compariſon to many, perhaps, I ought to account myſelf ſo; but if to be rich ſignifies to poſſeſs as much as we wiſh to uſe, I anſwer No: on the contrary, I am not many degrees removed from abſolute poverty." 'And ſo a few thouſands would do you no harm," ſaid the old lady. "My dear madam," replied Lord Danby, "I did not wait upon you with an intention to trouble you with an account of my wants: perhaps there are ſome among them," continued he, glancing his eyes upon our heroine, "which even thouſands could not ſupply. I am ambitious of being known to a lady, to whoſe moſt valuable character I have long ceaſed to be a ſtranger; and if I am happy enough to gain the loweſt place in her eſteem, I ſhall for the preſent think myſelf rich enough."

Mrs. Murray appeared highly pleaſed at a ſtrain of flattery, to which ſhe had not been accuſtomed; and looking with more than uſual cheerfulneſs, ſhe told him that he might not be the worſe for his diſintereſtedneſs. Lady Aſhford began to grow uneaſy; ſhe ſaw that Lord Danby was in a fair way to become a profeſſed favourite,

and

and had gained more upon the good graces of the old lady, in half an hour, than ſhe had ever been able to do in many a tedious and mortifying viſit. She endeavoured to divide her attention, by drawing a part of it to herſelf; but in vain. She would anſwer nobody but Lord Danby, and paid attention only to him. Her Ladyſhip coloured with vexation, which the old lady perceiving, exclaimed, "What, jealous! why I told you juſt now, that I had thoughts of marrying; and who knows but here is my match? What if I ſhould take it into my head to leave him my whole fortune, who do I wrong? Did I ever promiſe to leave it to any of you?" Lady Aſhford was about to reply, when Mrs. Murray again reſumed, "I would not have you think that I am angry with you, or diſlike you more than I uſed to do; but if I chuſe to have a favourite I'll have one; perhaps I may have more than one. I am apt to take likings at firſt ſight; if I don't then, I never do. And ſo as I think your viſit has been quite long enough, you are at liberty to take leave as ſoon as you pleaſe. I have ſomething to ſay to this young man alone, and will excuſe all the dear aunts and good madams that you are about to

ſay;

ſay; ſo farewel; take yourſelves down ſtairs."

Lady Aſhford was now conſtrained to riſe. She ſaid ſhe knew no affront was intended, and therefore ſhe ſhould take none; and wiſhing her aunt all poſſible increaſe of health and happineſs, got out of the room as faſt as poſſible, fearing to be overtaken by ſomething more groſs and abuſive than ſhe had yet experienced.

It would be difficult to ſay, whether Lady Aſhford was moſt mortified, or our heroine diverted, by the ſcene they had juſt quitted. The latter, however, could not help reflecting, with diſguſt, upon the mercenary diſpoſition of mankind, when ſhe ſaw perſons of Lady Aſhford's and Lord Danby's rank and fortune, paying court, in the moſt ſervile, abject manner, to a woman, whoſe perſon and mind were equally objects of averſion. She could not but wonder to ſee thoſe, who were not only independent, but poſſeſſed even ſuperfluity of wealth, ſtill craving to ſwell the unneceſſary heap, as was the caſe with the former; while, like the latter, others cringed and fawned upon thoſe they deſpiſed, and ſtooped to all the drudgery and meanneſs of groſs flattery, in order to acquire that which, when poſſeſſed, they

they flung away with undiſtinguiſhing careleſſneſs.

The firſt queſtion with which Sir Marmaduke ſaluted his lady upon her ſtepping out of the carriage, at Aſhford Park, was, "Well, Eleanor, what news from the city? Are we to look out our ſables, and pull out our white handkerchiefs?" 'You may, for the preſent, ſave yourſelf that trouble,' anſwered ſhe, my uncle is nearly recovered; however I have had an abſolute promiſe from him of all he ſhall die poſſeſſed of, let it happen when it will.' "Well, that's ſomething," replied he, "the ſooner promiſes are fulfilled the better, you know." He then condeſcended to aſk Caroline, if ſhe had had a pleaſant journey; but, without ſtaying to receive her anſwer, told his wife that he believed they ſhould not ſee Lord and Lady Walton that ſummer; that they had ſent to excuſe themſelves, on account of the latter not being very well, but that Miſs Weſt arrived the night before. Caroline, who had not heard a word of Lord and Lady Walton's intention of viſiting Aſhford Park, felt as though ſhe had eſcaped ſomething that would have given her uneaſineſs. The thought of ſeeing Miſs Weſt was not perfectly agreeable to her, her brother's late behaviour, and its apprehended

hended effects, had heightened her diſlike to a family from whom ſhe had ſuffered ſo much; and ſhe retired to her apartment, inſtead of following Lady Aſhford to the drawing-room, wiſhing for a few moments to compoſe her thoughts. She was there met by Kitty, who preſented her a letter, which ſhe ſaid came by the laſt night's poſt. She immediately knew the hand of her good friend Dr. Seward, and trembled to obſerve the black wax with which it was ſealed. It was natural to ſuppoſe that his ſiſter, who had been ill in Yorkſhire, was dead. Yet ſhe feared ſomething worſe, and her fears were prophetical. The doctor, in terms of the deepeſt, though manly, regret, informed her of the death of her beloved friend, which happened in conſequence of catching the fever and ſore throat, with which her ſiſter was affected.

The diſtreſs of our heroine was greater than words can deſcribe; ſhe was deprived of the only friend for whom ſhe felt a ſincere union of eſteem and affection; the only friend in whom ſhe could repoſe perfect confidence, or from whom ſhe expected comfort or aſſiſtance, ſhould ſhe ſtand in need of them. Her ſpirits, not high before, now ſunk to the loweſt ebb. She was unable to mix in any company, had it been

been ever ſo agreeable, much leſs to encounter the party now aſſembled in the drawing-room. She therefore ordered her maid to give the doctor's letter to her footman, and direct him to deliver it to Lady Aſhford; at the ſame time requeſting that ſhe would excuſe her remaining alone for the reſt of the day. She then reſigned herſelf up to tears and ſorrow. The loſs of her friend deeply wounded her affectionate heart, and, joined to the other loſs ſhe believed herſelf to have ſuſtained, quite overwhelmed her: her tears flowed in abundance. She believed they all flowed for her dear Mrs. Seward; but the amiable, and to her equally loſt, Rivers had his ſhare. The vacancy ſhe now felt in her heart was inexpreſſibly painful. She appeared to herſelf a poor forlorn wanderer in a dreary world; one in whoſe ſorrows no gentle boſom participated, and whoſe proſperity was intereſting only to herſelf.

Theſe melancholy reflections, for more than half the night, baniſhed ſleep from her eyes: at length, worn out by the fatigue of a journey, and the want of that ſoft reſtorer of nature, ſhe ſunk into a profound repoſe.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXV.

The Reſolution.

IT was late next morning before our heroine awoke; and Kitty informed her that Lady Aſhford had been at her door to inquire how ſhe reſted; and that the young 'Squire ſeemed very uneaſy about her. She ſtill felt the ſtrongeſt objection to going down; and told Kitty to bring her up a diſh of tea, being very hot and thirſty; and let Lady Aſhford know that ſhe was too indifferent to venture down, but would be happy to ſee her in her dreſſing-room. In a few moments her maid returned with Lady Aſhford's love to her; and to let her know that ſhe and all the reſt of the ladies would come up to ſee her after breakfaſt.

This was a compliment which Caroline could well have excuſed; however, it was better than going down to them; and having drank her tea, ſhe leaned her head upon her hand, in which ſhe held a cambrick handkerchief,

handkerchief, with which her face was half-concealed, and reſting her elbow upon the corner of her toilet, indulged that ſoft and bewitching melancholy to which genius and ſenſibility are ever prone. She had not long enjoyed this dangerous pleaſure, when ſhe was diſturbed by the entrance of Lady Aſhford, her daughter, her ſiſter, and Miſs Weſt. At a little diſtance, as if fearful of offending, they were followed by Mr. Aſhford; who could not reſiſt the inclination he felt to ſee his couſin, and convince himſelf of the real ſtate of her health; for which he began to entertain many tender apprehenſions.

Lady Aſhford, in the kindeſt manner, inquired how ſhe did? and expreſſed much concern upon feeling her hand, to find it ſo hot and dry. She ſaid ſhe was ſorry that ſhe had quitted her bed; and thought it would be beſt for her to return to it: in which opinion Mrs. Aſhford joined; adding, with more than common civility, that ſhe was ſorry to ſee her ſo ill. They had ſcarce done ſpeaking, when Miſs Weſt, with an air of the moſt perfect eaſe and unconſciouſneſs, aſked her if ſhe did not recollect her old acquaintance? Caroline, rouzed by her uncommon aſſurance and inſenſibility, anſwered, That was ſhe ſubject

to

to want of recollection, too many circumſtances had impreſſed the name of Weſt upon her memory, ever to endanger its being loſt in forgetfulneſs. Miſs Weſt coloured, in ſpite of the happy *ſangfroid* which ſhe had the art of aſſuming at pleaſure; but inſtantly recovering her wonted air of ſelf-ſatisfaction, ſhe began to admire the room; declaring that the taſte in which it was fitted up, was remarkably pretty; and though ſo much leſs expenſive, in her opinion, more than equalled the Counteſs of ———'s, about which ſuch a fuſs was made. "Yes," rejoined Mr. Aſhford, who had juſt paid his compliments to Caroline; "as much as the amiable planner of it excels that Counteſs, about whom ſuch a fuſs is made." 'Oh,' replied Miſs Weſt, 'the Counteſs is certainly very handſome.' "So I think," replied Mr. Aſhford. 'You really pay the handſomeſt compliments, friend,' ſaid Miſs Weſt, 'of any body I ever met with; but they are often loſt, for want of ſenſibility in the receiver.' "For want of vanity, you mean," replied he: "nothing makes a woman ſo quick-ſighted to a compliment as that." Juſt as he ſpoke theſe words, ſhe caſt her eyes upon the pictures, which were ſmall half-lengths, in oval frames, and hung at equal

diſtances, on one ſide of the room. 'Bleſs me,' cried ſhe, 'what have we here? your picture, Mr. Aſhford! and Caroline's, I proteſt! hung on each ſide of the good old lady your grandmother. What are we to think of this?' Mrs. and Miſs Aſhford, who had neither of them been before in Caroline's room ſince ſhe had altered the taſte of the furniture and ornaments, inſtantly turned their eyes towards the pictures; and with looks of anger and ſurprize, exclaimed, "I proteſt, and ſo there is!"

Mr. Aſhford was divided between ſurprize at the circumſtance, and concern for her to whom he believed himſelf indebted for ſo high a compliment. He longed to throw himſelf at her feet, to thank her for the favour ſhe had beſtowed even upon his ſhadow; when our heroine, with great compoſure of look and accent, informed them that the picture they had miſtaken for Mr. Aſhford's, had been painted for her father; as the other, which they ſuppoſed to be her's, was for her mother. This explanation at once put an end to their ſurprize and poor Mr. Aſhford's triumph. He hung his head, in ſilent mortification; and felt how much happier it is never to hope, than to be ſubject to the cruel pangs of diſappointment!

After

After a few remarks upon the wonderful reſemblance between Mr. Aſhford and the perſon from which the portrait they had miſtaken for his was painted, Caroline received all their good wiſhes for her better health; and Lady Aſhford told her ſhe ſhould order ſome whey; and begged ſhe would go to bed, and keep quiet.

As ſoon as they were gone, our heroine, finding the heat and thirſt, by which ſhe was oppreſt, increaſe, and her head begin to grow painful, reſolved to follow the advice ſhe had received; and, in purſuance of it, immediately put on her night-clothes, and, drinking a baſon of white wine whey, which Lady Aſhford's woman brought for her, reſigned herſelf to external quietneſs and inward perturbation.

Caroline had not continued in this ſtate more than an hour, when, ſome one knocking at the door, ſhe heard Lady Aſhford aſk whether ſhe was aſleep? "Is it you, Madam?" ſaid Caroline. "I am not at all inclined to ſleep. Do walk in." Her Ladyſhip then came into her bed-chamber, and aſked her if it would be diſagreeable to her to ſee Doctor Layton, who had juſt then called? "I am afraid you have given yourſelf the trouble of ſending for him," ſaid Caroline. 'No,' replied ſhe; 'he

came quite by accident; and upon inquiring where you was; and being told you was not well, he requeſted to ſee you: ſo fearing that if I ſent up a ſervant you might be diſturbed, I came myſelf to ſee how you are, and to know if you chuſe to ſee him.' Caroline thanked her for her kind attention, and ſaid, as the Doctor was there, ſhe would take his advice. He was accordingly called up; and after the uſual ceremony of feeling the pulſe, and preſcribed what he thought would be proper for her diſorder, John was immediately ſent to a neighbouring apothecary, to have the medicines made up.

The Doctor having chatted a little, and told all the family news that was ſtirring in the neighbourhood, aroſe to take leave; upon which Lady Aſhford, at Caroline's previous requeſt, offered him his uſual fee; but he abſolutely refuſed to touch it; ſaying, he intended only a friendly call, and had viſited Miſs Caroline at his own requeſt, not her's; and therefore could not think of being paid for it. His moderation ſurprized our heroine, as well as Lady Aſhford; he being remarkable for never refuſing a fee.

As ſoon as they were gone, Caroline directed Kitty to let down one of the win-

dow-

dow-curtains; for ſhe felt herſelf ſleepy, and wiſhed to indulge the comfortable propenſity. While ſhe was executing her orders, "I am ſure," ſaid ſhe, "I am glad the Doctor came; for I hope now, Ma'am, you will ſoon be better. It was very good of the young 'Squire to ſend for him, without ſaying a word to nobody. 'Did my couſin ſend for him?' aſked Caroline. 'How do you know?' "Why, Ma'am," anſwered Kitty, "I ſaw him ſend his man off the moment he came down from your room; and in about five minutes after his return, the Doctor came. So I aſked Charles; for I thought where he had been: and he owned that he was ſent to the Doctor with a note; and he ſays he is ſure there was money in it."—This accounted for the Doctor's deviation from his general rule of practice.

Caroline was grateful for her couſin's kindneſs and ſolicitude about her. She ſighed that ſhe could only be grateful. "How perverſe a heart is mine!" whiſpered ſhe in thought: "a worthy and amiable man ſighs to poſſeſs it in vain, while it has moſt improvidently beſtowed itſelf upon one who neither knows that it is his, nor probably wiſhes it to be ſo." A few tears accompanied this thought, and in ſome degree

gree relieved the oppreſſion under which ſhe laboured; but the ſleep ſhe hoped for was entirely flown, nor, till ſhe had taken a compoſing-draught, could ſhe obtain any. A gentle moiſture, which, ſoon after ſhe had taken it, diffuſed itſelf over her whole frame, removing the reſtleſs wearineſs ſhe had before felt, ſhe inſenſibly ſunk into a ſweet and refreſhing ſlumber, which continued for ſeveral hours; and from which ſhe awoke entirely free from any ſymptoms of fever, or other bodily diſorder. And as the mind will ever partake the good or ill its earthly partner enjoys or ſuffers, hers felt greatly ſtrengthened, and eaſed of much of the reſtleſs anxiety it had the day before endured. She was, upon recollection, aſhamed of the extreme weakneſs ſhe had betrayed; and reſolved, let the effort be ever ſo painful, to drive from her heart a paſſion which, if indulged, ſhe perceived would rob it of all that was amiable and worthy, and render her a poor forlorn reſtleſs creature, uſeleſs to others, and a burthen to herſelf.

In this reſolution ſhe aroſe and dreſſed herſelf, with her uſual elegance, went down to breakfaſt, and reſolved no longer to indulge herſelf in that dangerous luxury of tender thought wherein ſhe had lately ſo much

much delighted; but, by keeping as much as poſſible engaged in company and converſation, to eſcape from ideas too pleaſingly intruſive.

CHAP. XXVI.

A Diſappointment.

UPON entering the breakfaſt-room, ſhe found the ladies engaged in earneſt converſation. Something more than common ſeemed to be the ſubject, by the important ſwell of Mrs. Aſhford, the ſimper and affected careleſſneſs of her niece, and the extreme good-humour of Sir Marmaduke. Inquiries after her health being over, ſhe took her place among them, and began to chat with Mr. Aſhford, who appeared the only perſon diſengaged; the reſt being all in half-whiſper conſultations, about

about which ſhe felt not the ſmalleſt curioſity, and wiſhed to avoid the appearance of liſtening. At length Miſs Weſt, turning from Miſs Aſhford with an air of affected half-anger, "Well, well, my dear little Counteſs," ſaid ſhe, "if you will be obſtinate, there's no help for it: but, if I know any thing of the matter, you'll change your mind yet." 'No, that I ſhan't,' cries Miſs Aſhford; 'you'll ſee if I do. I'll tell you what, Weſt,' continued ſhe, and then another whiſper ſucceeded, which occaſioned a laugh from both.

"I think," ſaid Mrs. Aſhford, "we ought to tell Miſs Caroline this affair." 'By no means, if it is any ſecret,' anſwered our heroine. "Oh, it is no ſecret," replied Mrs. Aſhford, with a ſignificant look; "I hope Miſs Aſhford will never have any ſecrets of this nature: it is an affair of which ſhe has no need to be aſhamed; an affair that would do honour to the firſt young woman in England. In ſhort, Eleanor will very ſoon be married to one of the firſt young noblemen in the kingdom: ſhe will probably be a Counteſs before this day week." 'No, poſitively, aunt,' exclaimed Eleanor; 'not under a month, at the very ſooneſt.' "Don't tell me!" anſwered Mrs. Aſhford: "when my Lord comes

comes to plead for himſelf, you will never be able to reſiſt." 'So I tell her,' cried Miſs Weſt. 'In ſhort, who can reſiſt one of the handſomeſt men in England, when he throws his fortune, title, heart, and perſon at one's feet! Don't be jealous, my dear little Counteſs; but I was once more than half in love with him myſelf; and ſo was Caroline too, though ſhe looks ſo demure.' "With whom?" replied our heroine. "Who do you mean?" 'Why, our old Bath acquaintance, Lord Danby,' replied Miſs Weſt. 'Don't you remember him?' "Lord Danby!" exclaimed Caroline. "Is my couſin, Eleanor, going to be married to Lord Danby?" 'Yes, to Lord Danby,' anſwered Mrs. Aſhford; 'where pray is the wonder? She is not the firſt Aſhford who has married a nobleman; and if her perſon and accompliſhments will not procure her ſomething above a ſhabby commoner, it is hard indeed! Beſides, ſhe will now be one of the firſt fortunes in England, and will be entitled to figure with the firſt women in town. See here,' continued ſhe, preſenting a letter; 'this will explain the matter fully; and then you will know what we are about.' Caroline took the letter, and, with ſome difficulty, made out the following words:

"Sir

" Sir Marmaduke Aſhford,

" At the requeſt of my nephew, Lord " Danby, I ſit down to inform you, that " he is fallen violently in love with your " daughter, and wiſhes to marry her. In " caſe you will conſent to the match, and " ſhe is willing, I will immediately give " them up forty thouſand pounds; and the " reſt of my fortune, which amounts to " twice that ſum, I will ſettle upon them " after my death. Let me know, by re- " turn of meſſenger, whether you like the " propoſal. If ſo, Lord Danby will be with " you on Thurſday, with deeds ready ſign- " ed.

ANN MURRAY."

The ſurprize of our heroine was viſible in her countenance; which Miſs Weſt obſerving, exclaimed, " I proteſt Caroline is diſappointed! Oh, I had forgot that he danced with you once or twice: however, we muſt both be content; I fear it is neither of our fates to be Counteſſes." 'What ſignifies dancing-acquaintance,' cried Mrs. Aſhford; 'you may dance with a man for ever,

ever, and never make any impreſſion upon his heart. You ſee, one glance from the eyes of Eleanor (for he never, that we know of, ſaw her but once) could do more than all the dancing upon earth." "I ſincerely wiſh my counſin every poſſible kind of happineſs," ſaid Caroline; "but I muſt confeſs that Lord Danby is one of the laſt men from whom I ſhould have expected ſuch an attachment." 'And why ſo?' exclaimed her aunt. 'What, becauſe he has indulged himſelf in a few faſhionable liberties? Mere trifles in a man of his conſequence!' "If you think them ſo," anſwered Caroline, "it is very well; but in my opinion, ſuch habits muſt be the ruin of all domeſtic happineſs." 'Oh, cried Mrs. Aſhford, 'when he is united to the woman of his choice, reformation comes of courſe.' "Oh certainly," ſaid Miſs Weſt; "but Caroline is jealous; I ſee that plain enough." Jealous!' repeated Eleanor, with a ſcornful ſmile and toſs of her head. "Aye jealous, truly," exclaimed Mrs. Aſhford. "I hope ſhe has too much ſenſe to make any ſuch pretenſions. Excluſive of Miſs Aſhford's other acompliſhments, ſhe will be one of the firſt fortunes in the kingdom. Of fifty thouſand pounds, the half of her mother's fortune, my brother cannot hinder her: ſhe will

will have every ſhilling of which I die poſſeſſed; and I make no doubt but Lord Walton, and ſeveral other relations, will leave her large legacies; ſo that I eſtimate her fortune, at leaſt, an hundred thouſand pounds." 'Well, that's a bribe for Lord Danby certainly,' ſaid Mr. Aſhford coldly. "A bribe!" exclaimed his aunt: "he wants no bribe. I have not the ſmalleſt doubt but he would marry your ſiſter, if ſhe had not a guinea in the world." 'He is much obliged to you, however,' ſaid Mr. Aſhford, 'for ſuch a preſumption to his favour.

Sir Marmaduke here interpoſed.—He ſaid that was an idle queſtion, and had nothing to do in the buſineſs: That if Lord Danby liked Eleanor in her preſent circumſtance, it was enough, as there was no great danger of their being altered. "There is but one thing," continued he, "that gives me uneaſineſs; and that is, my promiſe to Sir Charles Beaumont." Of what conſequence is that?' anſwered Mrs. Aſhford; 'the man is dead, and cannot claim it.' "True," replied the Baronet; "but he recalled his ſon from his travels, on purpoſe to fulfil the engagement: and I know, in a letter he wrote to him upon his death-bed, he made it his laſt requeſt that he would do ſo.

ſo. I have likewiſe written to him ſince the death of his father, and invited him here; which certainly amounted to nothing leſs than a renewal of the agreement; and I have every reaſon to expect him ſhortly to claim my promiſe." 'Well,' anſwered Mrs. Aſhford, 'it cannot be helped: nobody can wonder that we ſhould give the preference to a nobleman.'

"Upon my word, Madam," cried Miſs Weſt, turning to Eleanor, "a Viſcount and a Baronet at your feet at one time! Do, beſtow ſome of your ſuperfluities upon your poor friends! you can have but one, you know; and here are a couple of poor forlorn damſels, who cannot procure one betwen them." She had ſcarce pronounced theſe words, when Sir Marmaduke, riſing and going to a window, cried, 'Whoſe carriage can that be which ſtops at the porter's lodge?' Miſs Weſt immediately taking up a ſmall perſpective which lay upon the chimney-piece, and fixing it to her eye, exclaimed, "It is the moſt beautiful vis-a-vis I ever beheld; four fine horſes; and one, two, three ſervants in rich liveries." 'Whoſe can it be?' cried Eleanor. "I warrant," exclaimed Mrs. Aſhford, "it is your Lord: too impatient to ſtay till to-morrow." 'Bleſs me!' exclaimed Lady Aſhford,

Aſhford, ‘ we are ſadly unprovided in the larder : I muſt give orders immediately.’ So ſaying, ſhe hurried out of the room.

Yes, yes,” cried Miſs Weſt, ſtill looking through the teleſcope, “ I now ſee the coronet.” ‘ Oh, let me ſee,’ exclaimed Eleanor ; ‘ let me ſee it !’ “ Aye, aye,” ſaid Mrs. Aſhford, with a look of inexpreſſible triumph, “ it will be no rarity to you by this day month.” The carriage now approached. Sir Marmaduke and Mr. Aſhton went out to meet their gueſt, while the ladies ran to a large looking-glaſs, and adjuſted their hair and handkerchiefs, As for our heroine, ſhe retired to a further corner of the room, conceiving herſelf perfectly unintereſted in the affair ; and, on account of the inſinuations which Miſs Weſt had thrown out, wiſhing to appear what ſhe truly was, wholly indifferent about it.

In a few minutes the gentlemen returned, introducing Lord Danby. As they entered, Sir Marmaduke was concluding a ſpeech about the honour his family was receiving ; and his Lordſhip muttered ſomething concerning happineſs, attachment, and many other fine things, which he ſeemed to feel better than arrange or expreſs. He was firſt preſented to Lady Aſhford, who was juſt ſlipped into the room. She appeared

peared half-frightened while he paid her his reſpects: next, to Mrs. Aſhford; who, willing to diſplay her ſuperior addreſs, and make amends for the deficiency of her ſiſter, overwhelmed him with compliments. He was then let up to Eleanor; while the ſparkling eyes of her aunt followed him, in hopes of beholding raptures the moſt lively and tranſporting; but what was her ſurprize to ſee him only bow reſpectfully, and, quitting her in a moment, hurry to the other ſide of the room, where our heroine ſtood.

Approaching Caroline with the moſt impaſſioned look, he took one of her hands, and, before ſhe could diſengage it; kiſſed it, with every appearance of delight. "Have I then at laſt the happineſs to hope for your ſmiles?" ſaid he. Am I allowed, before our mutual friends and the whole world, to declare the paſſion which took poſſeſſion of my heart the firſt moment I beheld you?"— He was proceeding, when Caroline, withdrawing her hand, exclaimed, 'What do you mean, Sir? It is my couſin to whom theſe compliments ſhould be addreſſed; I am not the daughter of Sir Marmaduke Aſhford.' The countenance of Lord Danby expreſſed aſtoniſhment; but his feelings were faint in compariſon of

thoſe

thoſe endured by the group on the oppoſite ſide of the room. Rage, which decency could hardly ſuppreſs, blazed in the little gray eyes of Mrs Aſhford. Amazement ſeemed to have ſtopped the breath of her niece and ſiſter. Sir Marmaduke had drawn himſelf up with a frown of haughty reſerve and obſervation; Mr. Aſhford appeared in a ſtate of uneaſy ſuſpence; and Miſs Weſt ſunk behind, turning away her face to conceal a violent inclination to laugh, with which ſhe was ſeized.

"Not the daughter of Sir Marmaduke Aſhford, Madam!" exclaimed Lord Danby. "By what means have I been deceived? Sure you only wiſh to amuſe yourſelf at my expence!" Then turning to the company, "What am I to believe?" ſaid he. "Is it poſſible that I can have been led into ſo ſtrange an error?" 'Yes, you have been deceived indeed,' cried Mrs. Aſhford, almoſt choaked with rage: 'you have miſtaken a poor dependent for one of the moſt accompliſhed young women and largeſt fortunes in England. See here, Sir,' continued ſhe, 'this is Miſs Aſhford; as much ſuperior to the doll you have been complimenting, as her fortune and expectations are greater.' "In what degree of relationſhip then does this lady ſtand to you?" ſaid his

his Lordſhip, addreſſing Sir Marmaduke. 'She is my niece, Sir,' anſwered the Baronet, 'the daughter of a diſinherited brother.' "I am ſure,"" continued Mrs. Aſhford, "if you will conſult your own eyes and underſtanding, there is no compariſon between them, no more than there is between a bare maintenance and an hundred thouſand pounds. Your Lordſhip will take a little time to conſider upon it; and if you ſhould, as I have no doubt but you will, repent of your miſtake, I will undertake to intercede with my niece in your behalf."

'I am greatly obliged to you, Madam,' ſaid Lord Danby; 'but I have only miſtaken the rank, not the perſon of the woman I admire. My affections are irremoveably fixed; nor can difference of ſituation ever alter them. I came here, Sir,' continued he to Sir Marmaduke, 'to demand, as I believed, your daughter: I am ſorry for the miſtake that hath happened; which I hope you and your family will do me the juſtice to believe was far from being a wilful one. I am ſtill ambitious of becoming a relation to ſo ancient and reſpectable a houſe; and if this lady,' turning to Caroline, 'will permit me to hope for her favour, I am ſure Mrs. Murray will continue firm

to

to her agreement: the forty thouſand pounds ſhe means to give, ſhall be conſidered as her fortune; and ſettlements be made accordingly.' "I am ſure," exclaimed Mrs. Aſhford, "my brother will never conſent to any ſuch thing! What! join in the inſult which hath been offered to his daughter, and rob his own children to enrich a worthleſs girl, who has already ſtripped them of ſo much? Sure, Sir, you think us fools! people who know nothing of the world! If Mr. Aſhford had a ſpirit worthy the anceſtors from whom he deſcended, he would before this have interpoſed, and let you ſee that the lady you have dared to affront in this outrageous manner, wants not friends to defend her honour and that of her family, who are all injured in her." 'I fancy,' replied Mr. Aſhford, 'my ſiſter would not wiſh to be forced upon Lord Danby. As for inſult, I cannot think any hath been intended or offered; and for my couſin's acceptance of his laſt offer, it muſt ſurely reſt entirely with herſelf; nor do I ſee any thing my father, or any of us, have to do in her deciſion.' "Mean-ſpirited wretch!" cried his aunt, half-frantic with paſſion; "and ſo you will tamely ſuffer your ſiſter to be rejected with ſcorn and contempt, while a little

little pitiful puſs, who is maintained by the charity of the family, triumphs in her diſappointment, and puts on the Counteſs under her very noſe!"

'If that is all which diſturbs you, Madam,' ſaid our heroine, advancing with modeſt gracefulneſs, 'I will inſtantly make you eaſy. For the compliment your Lordſhip hath paid me I cannot do leſs than return my thanks,' continued ſhe, addreſſing Lord Danby. 'I am ſorry the unaccountable error you have fallen into has led you ſo much further than prudence would otherwiſe have ſuffered you to proceed; and am ſure that, in a few hours, you will thank me for declaring, that were you a prince, and would enrich me with half your dominions, I would reject the offer, as I now beg leave to do that with which you have honoured me.' So ſaying, ſhe courteſied reſpectfully, and quitted the room.

She had not been in her apartment more than twenty minutes, before ſhe ſaw Lord Danby's vis-a-vis draw up, and his Lordſhip get in. He was attended to the door by Mr. Aſhford, with whom he appeared to part in much civility.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVII.

The Surprize.

IT hath often been ſaid, "That perfect rectitude is a ſtranger to fear."—In the preſent inſtance, however, theory is contradicted by experience. Our heroine was as much afraid of encountering Mrs. Aſhford and the reſt of the family at dinner, as if ſhe had actually committed ſome conſiderable crime, or done them a wilful and material injury. It was with difficulty ſhe prevailed upon herſelf to go down; and when ſhe arrived at the door, her feet made an involuntary ſtand. Mrs. Aſhford's voice was loud. "I tell you, ſiſter," ſaid ſhe, "there will be no peace in the houſe while ſhe ſtays in it. To how many more inſults will you expoſe your family, by your fooliſh partiality?" 'It is ſurely very hard,' ſaid Lady Aſhford, 'to puniſh her, becauſe ſhe

ſhe is handſome! and I can really find no other fault you have to accuſe her of.' "True," anſwered Mr. Aſhford: "it would indeed be cruel!" 'Oh, you are always ready to take her part,' cried Mrs. Aſhford: 'you are ready to defend every thing but your own honour! Had I been a man, Lord Danby ſhould not have left the houſe before he had given me ſatisfaction, or made my ſiſter amends for the affront he offered her.'

As ſhe ſpoke theſe words a ſervant appeared in view, and Caroline was obliged to open the door; which ſhe did with a trembling hand. The moment ſhe entered, Mr. Aſhford met her, and, with a more than uſually cheerful countenance, led her to a chair; and when, in a few minutes, they were informed that dinner was ready, he conducted her to the dining-parlour in the ſame manner; and, ſeating himſelf by her ſide, endeavoured to prevent her obſerving the ſcornful and angry looks of his ſiſter and aunt. They were, however, too viſible to eſcape her notice.

Mrs. Aſhford was every moment throwing out ſomething which ſhe thought would vex Caroline. Something about prudes and jilts, and paltry dependents coming into families to rob and diſturb them. This

This treatment was ſo very diſagreeable, that ſhe ſuddenly reſolved to make an excurſion for a week or fortnight; by which time, ſhe hoped, things would be at leaſt in their old ſtate again; or if, upon her return, ſhe ſtill found her aunt and couſin in the ſame bad humour, to quit her uncle's houſe entirely, and ſeek among ſtrangers that peace and affection ſhe found it vain to expect from her own relations.

In the courſe of the evening Caroline communicated her intention to Lady Aſhford, who greatly approved it; ſaying, ſhe was very ſorry for the unreaſonable behaviour of her daughter and Mrs. Aſhford; but added, "You know, my dear, I have no power over them: the utmoſt I can do is to live with tolerable peace among them. If it was not for the amuſement and conſolation that books afford, I ſhould find my life not the moſt comfortable.

Caroline was but too ſenſible of the truth of what ſhe ſaid. At her earneſt requeſt ſhe promiſed to ſtay only one fortnight; and that evening diſpatched her ſervant to the neighbouring town, to order a poſt-chaiſe to be at Aſhford Park by ſix the next morning. She then gave Kitty directions to put up a good quantity of habit-linen, as ſhe meant to take no other dreſs, it being her intention

intention to paſs the time ſhe wiſhed to be abſent from her uncle, with Mrs. Foreſter and her favourite little Mary; for whom ſhe took ſeveral preſents, ſuch as afford children of her age inexpreſſible delight; a large dreſſed doll being one of the number.

After as pleaſant a journey as the want of a ſuitable companion would permit it to be, ſhe arrived at the houſe of Mr. Williams; where ſhe was received with inexpreſſible joy by every inhabitant. She had the ſatisfaction of finding Mrs. Foreſter and her beautiful little daughter perfectly well, and quite pleaſed and comfortable in their new habitation. Her friend Doctor Seward was ſoon apprized of her arrival. The ſight of him again revived the tender ſorrow which the loſs of her beloved friend had ſo lately occaſioned. He preſented her with a miniature of his ſiſter; which was received by our heroine as the moſt valuable preſent he could poſſibly have made her.

Having continued the time ſhe at firſt intended in this retreat of neatneſs, peace, and comfort, her promiſe to Lady Aſhford obliged her to return; and quitting it with the utmoſt reluctance, after an abſence of fifteen

fifteen days, ſhe again beheld Aſhford Park.

Upon alighting at the door, ſhe inquired whether her aunt was at home? The ſervant, who perfectly underſtood that ſhe meant Lady Aſhford (it never being her practice to uſe that appellation when ſpeaking of her to whom it properly belonged) anſwered, that her Ladyſhip was in her dreſſing-room. She therefore ſent her maid to inform her of her arrival, and to ſay that, if ſhe was at leiſure to ſee her, ſhe ſhould be glad to inquire after her health.

Caroline received for anſwer, that Lady Aſhford would be happy to ſee her: upon which ſhe went directly to her apartment. Nothing could be more kind than her reception: and after the firſt compliments uſual upon meeting were over, Lady Aſhford told her ſhe would be received quite graciouſly by her aunt and couſin. "We are all in high good-humour," continued ſhe: "we have got a new lover, who is worth ten thouſand of Lord Danby: handſomer, more gallant, ſenſible, and accompliſhed. In ſhort, Eleanor ſays ſhe ſhall never be thankful enough for her eſcape from the laſt propoſal; and that, were a Duke to offer himſelf, ſhe would prefer Sir William Beaumont."

'I rejoice

'I rejoice to hear it,' cried Caroline: 'I hope indeed ſhe will be a great gainer by the exchange, and have a much better proſpect of happineſs with this gentleman than ſhe could have had with Lord Danby.' "I hope ſo too," anſwered Lady Aſhford. "His character is uncommonly good; and, if one may believe appearances, he is poſſeſſed of every poſſible good quality."

While ſhe was yet ſpeaking, Mrs. Aſhford and Eleanor entered. They ſaid, hearing that Caroline was returned, they came to inquire how ſhe did. They were uncommonly civil; but excuſed themſelves from ſtaying long; ſaying, Sir William expected them in the drawing-room: that they had juſt had a delightful walk, and muſt ſoon dreſs for dinner. Soon after they left Lady Aſhford's room, our heroine followed their example, and retired to her own, in order to make ſimilar preparations. As ſhe wiſhed to live, if poſſible, upon tolerable terms with them, ſhe reſolved not to appear ſtiff and diſtant now they ſeemed inclined to ſome degree of ſociability.

The proſpect of Eleanor's marriage was very agreeable to Caroline. She concluded that her aunt would remove along with her: and made no doubt of living in the moſt comfortable and eaſy manner with Lady

Aſhford when they were gone; and as ſhe hoped that would be very ſoon, determined to exert every poſſible effort to continue in a ſtate of amity with them till their departure: An event of which ſhe made herſelf quite certain. No ſooner, therefore, was ſhe dreſſed, than without waiting for a ſummons to dinner, as was her uſual cuſtom, ſhe walked down to the drawing-room, which finding quite empty, ſhe ſat down upon a ſopha, and took up a book to amuſe herſelf; but her mind being more inclined than uſual to wander upon forbidden ſubjects, ſhe threw it aſide, and opening a door which communicated with a ſmaller drawing-room, in which an organ was fixed, ſat down and played ſeveral leſſons in her uſual maſterly ſtile. By degrees her mind was perfectly compoſed and harmonized. She ſung; and the ſoftneſs which, in ſpite of all her efforts, hung about her heart, added to her natural taſte and expreſſion, gave a pathos to her charming voice, which entered the very ſoul. She had juſt finiſhed an elegant and affecting air, when ſhe heard the words, charming! admirable! ſpoken behind her, in a voice of extreme rapture. She ſtartled; and ſuddenly turning round, beheld Mr. Rivers. The moment he ſaw her face, his ſurprize

appeared

appeared equal to her own; but it was quickly changed into fright and concern, when he ſaw her pale and almoſt inſenſible. He flew to her aſſiſtance, and, catching her in his arms, placed her upon a ſopha, ſtill holding her, with a gentle preſſure, cloſe to his boſom. She was but half-reviv-ed, but half diſengaged from his embrace, when the appearance of Lady Aſhford, her aunt, and Oleanor, threw her almoſt into as bad a condition as that out of which ſhe was recovering.

"Bleſs me! what have we here?" ex-claimed Mrs. Aſhford. "What is the matter, Sir George? Sure this girl has not been practiſing her old arts upon you?" 'The affair, my dear madam, is a mere accident,' anſwered Sir George. 'This lady was playing upon the organ; drawn by the fineneſs of her voice and execution, I approached too unguardedly, and her fright occaſioned the effects to which you have been a witneſs.' "She's wonderfully delicate, no doubt," rejoined Miſs Aſhford; "theſe kind of airs are really very ridicu-lous." Caroline was, by this time, pretty well recovered, and apologized to Lady Aſhford for the alarm ſhe had accaſioned. Her heart, however, ſtill fluttered with aſtoniſhment; and ſhe longed to know by

what magic Mr. Rivers was become Sir William Beaumont. To this change ſhe ſhould have had no particular objection, had not Sir George Beaumont been the profeſſed lover of Miſs Aſhford: a circumſtance, upon which ſhe could not reflect without anguiſh. During dinner, and the remainder of the day, he took little notice of her; the greateſt part of his converſation was directed to Sir Marmaduke and Lady Aſhford. It was impoſſible to imagine him the lover of Eleanor; Miſs Weſt ſeemed rather the object of his attention; but he was more complaiſant to Mrs. Aſhford than to either of them. If his eyes met thoſe of our heroine, he inſtantly withdrew them; and, when ſhe ſpoke, his attention generally ſeemed to be taken up ſome other way; and he affected to ſpeak of ſomething foreign to whatever ſhe had mentioned.

How differeet was this from what ſhe had experienced when ſhe ſaw him laſt? when every word was compliment! every look admiration! Could the circumſtance of Captain Weſt's rudeneſs occaſion ſuch a change? She could aſſign no other. But why ſhould ſhe trouble herſelf about the cauſe or its effects? What was he? What could he ever be to her? Ought ſhe not

to thank him for a behaviour which muſt ſo much aſſiſt her efforts to conquer an ill-placed paſſion? Yes, ſhe would conquer it! Had ſhe not reaſon to reſent his conduct, in introducing himſelf to her under the diſguiſe of a feigned name? Had his deſigns been ſuch as honour would warrant, concealment of any kind had been neceſſary. No, it was plain, in ſpite of his pleaſing manners and apparent goodneſs, that his attachment to her had been as diſhonourable as his preſent one was mercenary, and that he feared to acknowledge his paſt acquaintance with her, leſt it ſhould injure him in the opinion of her uncle and his family.

After much reflection, and often changing her reſolves, ſhe determined to ſee him as little as poſſible; never to mention her having met with him before; and, let her fooliſh obſtinate heart, feel what it would, ſuffer things to take their natural courſe, and patiently behold him the huſband of Eleanor.

In purſuance of this reſolution, Caroline ſeldom appeared but at meals, and then retired again the very firſt opportunity; in which ſhe was never oppoſed by any of the family. She often ſpent an hour or two in Lady Aſhford's dreſſing-room; who acknowledged

knowledged to her that ſhe wiſhed the marriage of her daughter well over; but ſhe feared it was at a greater diſtance than they had ſome time back believed. She ſaid, when Sir George firſt arrived, he appeared willing to conclude the affair; but, after a few days, as if the knowledge of Eleanor had cooled his ardour, he became more indifferent; and lately avoided to ſpeak at all upon the ſubject, either to her or to Sir Marmaduke; and ſhe ſhould not wonder if it yet came to nothing.

Returning one morning from a viſit of this kind, ſhe found the door of her dreſſing-room open; and happening to turn her eyes to that ſide on which the pictures hung, ſhe miſſed that of her mother.—Kitty was ſummoned; and the room, as well as her bed-chamber, carefully ſearched; but in vain: the picture was nowhere to be found. Kitty was ordered to inquire among the ſervants, and to offer each, ſeparately, five guineas, if they could find out where it was, and reſtore it to her again.

A week had paſſed ſince this accident, and ſhe had loſt all hope of ever recovering her beloved picture, when, happening to walk in the ſhrubbery rather late in the evening,

evening, a favourite pleaſure with her, ſhe ſaw Sir William Beaumont reclining upon a ſeat, at a ſmall diſtance from the place where ſhe ſtood. The moon ſhone full upon him; and ſhe diſtinctly ſaw it in his hand. He gazed ſtedfaſtly upon it, then kiſſed and preſſed it to his heart. After he had repeated this ſeveral times, he carefully put it up, and walked to the houſe in a muſing poſture, his arms folded acroſs his boſom.

Our heroine was irreſiſtibly impelled to ſeat herſelf for a moment upon the bench he had quitted. A thouſand tender thoughts crowded into her mind: but ſtarting up, as from a dream, and reproaching herſelf for this momentary weakneſs, ſhe endeavoured to amuſe her imagination with other ideas. She began to think how ſhe ſhould recover her picture; and reſolved, if poſſible, to get it out of his hands, both on account of the value ſhe ſet upon it, and the great impropriety ſhe conceived there was in its remaining in his poſſeſſion.

At ſupper ſhe watched his looks with more attention than ſhe had lately allowed herſelf to do; but none of them were directed to her. In vain ſhe ſtrove to read the characters of guilt, meaneſs, or art, in his

his countenance: all there was openneſs, ſenſe, and honour. Puzzled by facts and appearances ſo contradictory, ſhe retired to reſt, — or rather reſt's worſt foe, Reflection.

The following evening was ſerene and pleaſant, beyond what is common to a northern climate; but Caroline reſolved to truſt herſelf with no more walks by moon-light. How are the wiſeſt deceived! if indeed any man who loves can pretend to wiſdom. To avoid giving nouriſhment to the dangerous paſſion whoſe influence ſhe dreaded, ſhe flew to its very food.

The little drawing-room in which the organ ſtood, had a large window fronting the riſing moon, which now being in the full, ſhone with unclouded majeſty. Hither our heroine came; and, carefully ſhutting the outward door, as well as that of communication between the two rooms, ſhe drew down the window, that not a ſound might iſſue forth: and to avoid even the poſſibility of intruſion, turned the key which ſtood on the inſide of the door.— Fully ſatisfied of her ſafety, ſhe ſat down, little dreaming that the care ſhe had taken to exclude danger had only put her more

more abſolutely in the power of an incloſed enemy.

She had not ventured to touch the organ ſince the fright ſhe ſuffered from Sir William. The little air ſhe then played preſented itſelf to her fingers; ſhe rejected it, and played another. Again it recurred; and ſo often, that at laſt ſhe could not withſtand its ſolicitation; yet, when her fingers had run over a few bars, they could move no longer: her voice faltered, and ſhe burſt into tears.

Long might Caroline have remained in this ſtate of tender ſorrow, had not a ruſtling, which ſhe heard in the room, rouſed her attention. Looking round, with an eye of apprehenſion, what was her amazement when ſhe beheld Sir William Beaumont at her feet! — "Be not alarmed, moſt lovely of women," ſaid he, reſpectfully, taking one of her hands; "this is no intended intruſion. I ſaw you enter, beheld the caution with which you ſecured yourſelf, and have enjoyed a ſtate of luxury which an eaſtern monarch might envy. It was my intention to have ſuffered you to depart, without knowing that I was preſent; but thoſe tears, who could ſee them unmoved! Why, loveliеſt of women, why are you unhappy? Can my life,

my

my fortune——" 'Hold Sir,' exclaimed Caroline; 'neither of them can be uſeful to me. You have ungenerouſly intruded upon my privacy, and witneſſed emotions I would die to conceal. But add not inſult to rudeneſs, nor further diſturb a mind already too much agitated.'

At theſe words ſhe diſengaged her hand from his graſp, and was about to open the door, when, gently oppoſing her intention, "Stay!" exclaimed he; "ſtay a moment, I beſeech you! I know not what I would ſay! Sure, nothing but innocence and purity can inhabit ſuch a form!" 'Let me go, Sir,' ſaid ſhe. 'What would my couſin think, if ſhe beheld you now?' "Your couſin," replied Sir William, "is nothing to me: I am not ſuch a villain as to think of marryihg one woman, with an unconquered preference for another in my heart. When I firſt came here, I believed that I had power to ſubdue it; but I now find my miſtake; and, from this moment, quit her for ever.—It is my comfort that no declaration has ever paſſed my lips; for I never could prevail upon myſelf to make any, and that the natural inſenſibility of Miſs Aſhford ſecures her from feeling any pains, except thoſe of vanity. Thus, if Fate has

has put an irremovable bar between me and happineſs, I may at leaſt eſcape miſery."

Scarce had he uttered theſe words, when their ears were ſuddenly aſſailed by a violent knocking at the door; at the ſame time Mrs. Aſhford's voice, at its higheſt pitch, exclaimed, "open the door this moment! open it I ſay! inſolent creature, come out!" She went on, but the attention of Sir William was wholly taken up with his fair companion, who, all pale and trembling, exclaimed, "What will become of me! Oh, Sir William, what a ſituation have you brought me into!" 'I will protect you, my life,' cried he, 'from every inſult.' "Unlock the door," anſwered ſhe," recovering from her fright, "and at leaſt do me the juſtice to inform my uncle of the truth." The door was then opened, and in ruſhed the whole family. "Are you not aſhamed to look us in the face?" cried Mrs. Aſhford; "what is the meaning of ſuch behaviour? what, muſt you lock yourſelves up to abuſe the family, under whoſe roof you are ſheltered? As for that girl, after what has paſſed, I wonder at nothing ſhe does; but for you, Sir William! a man of honour, a gentleman, and one received into the family

mily as you have been!" 'In juſtice to this innocent ſufferer by my folly,' anſwered Sir William, 'I muſt explain the cauſe of your preſent diſturbance.' He then related the whole circumſtance, juſt as it had occurred. The moment he had done ſpeaking, "Very well, very fine," cried Mrs. Aſhford. "Now pray how do you explain your words? what do you ſay to the diſreſpectful things I heard you utter about my niece?" 'I will, Madam,' anſwered Sir William, 'in a few words explain my whole conduct. A few weeks ſince, fortune (I then thought it good fortune) introduced me to this lovely woman. I had ſeveral times the dangerous pleaſure of being in her company, though from whim, and a deſire of being attended to for my own ſake, without the ſound of a title, I appeared before her under a falſe name and character. What my intentions then were, or why I have altered them, muſt remain for ever a ſecret in his boſom. Whatever impreſſion ſhe had made upon my heart I believed it was wholly effaced, and that nothing was wanting to reſtore my tranquility but another attachment, more fortunate. In compliance with the requeſt of a dying father, and the invitation of Sir Marmaduke, I came to Aſh-

ford

ford Park; but I came not as a ſlave, who was forced to take what others had choſen, but as a free man, unbound in honour or inclination, and at liberty to make my own election. That liberty, that honour, are ſtill my own; I have entered into no engagements; I am fettered by no promiſe: my viſit has been merely one of friendſhip: and I take my leave, in the full perſuaſion that I have done nothing to forfeit my pretenſions to a continuance of that honour.'

He then turned to Caroline, who ſtood pale and motionleſs. 'To you, lovelieſt of women,' ſaid he, 'before I take leave of you, perhaps for ever, let me declare, that whatever may be my future diſpoſal in life, you, and you only, can poſſeſs my heart; and that honour never obtained a harder victory than it now can boaſt, in tearing me from you!'—The laſt words were almoſt inarticulate: and he quitted the room, caſting upon our heroine a look, at once expreſſive of love, pity, and regret.

The whole group ſtood, for a moment, loſt in paſſion and amazement. Mrs. Aſhford firſt recovered the uſe of that never-failing inſtrument of diſturbance, her tongue. "Very well!" ſaid ſhe; "this

" this is complete! this crowns all! I hope, ſiſter, you will ſtill defend your favourite; ſtill keep her in your houſe, that your daughter may receive a few more inſults! But mark this: Either ſhe or I leave this houſe to-morrow morning; I will not ſleep a ſecond night under the ſame roof with ſuch a dangerous incendiary.

" You are right ſiſter," replied Sir Marmaduke: " I have been a fool too long, to harbour a ſerpent that has ſo often ſtung me!" Then turning to Caroline, " Young woman," ſaid he, " I have done with you. I ſee you know how to make friends for yourſelf. You muſt chooſe another guardian. From this hour you are a ſtranger to me; nor after to-night do I ever permit you to ſleep again under my roof." So ſaying, he walked out of the room, with a ſevere and ſtately air. Even Lady Aſhford followed him out in ſilence, not having a ſingle word to utter in defence of her poor *protegee*.

Only Mr. Aſhford ventured to hazard his father's diſpleaſure, by ſtaying behind. Approaching our heroine with a look of pity and affection, " Do not think," ſaid he, " that you are yet without one friend in this inhoſpitable houſe. Tell me, my

dear

dear couſin, where will you go? Oh, that theſe arms might afford you ſhelter! but be aſſured, wherever you go, there is one man in the world, whoſe heart, hand, fortune, and life, are at your command."—'Generous Mr. Aſhford,' exclaimed Caroline, 'how ſhall I thank you! how be ever able to return the obligations I owe you! but be not uneaſy on my account; I am reſolved to chuſe my mother's brother for my guardian, and in his houſe, which is a reſpectable one, I ſhall probably for ſome time remain.'

Having afforded Mr. Aſhford this ſatisfaction, ſhe hurried to her own apartment, where ſhe directed Kitty immediately to put up her clothes for a journey; telling her ſhe ſhould make a long ſtay, and want every thing ſhe had. She then ordered John to beſpeak a poſt-chaiſe, to be at the door by five the next morning; hoping, by ſetting off at that early hour, to avoid the pain of again ſeeing Mr. Aſhford. She next ſent her maid to Lady Aſhford's dreſſing-room, to requeſt that ſhe would permit her to take leave of her before ſhe quitted the houſe; but received for anſwer, that her Ladyſhip was extremely ſorry ſhe could not have the pleaſure of ſeeing her, as ſhe had been obliged to promiſe Sir Marmaduke

Marmaduke and Mrs. Aſhford to the contrary; that ſhe wiſhed her a good journey, and ſhould always be happy to hear of her proſperity.

All things being in readineſs for the next morning, Caroline went to bed, where, as might be well expected, ſhe paſſed a ſleepleſs night. The day ſcarce began to dawn ere ſhe was up, and had waited ſome time before the chaiſe drove to the door: ſhe ſtepped in, and, without a ſigh, took leave of a houſe, where ſhe had experienced little but trouble and vexation.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVI.

The City Beau.

VARIOUS were the reflections, which, by turns, poſſeſſed the mind of our heroine during her journey. The certainty of being tenderly beloved by the only man in the world to whom her heart could ever give a preference, could not but be attended with pleaſure, yet the apprehenſion of never beholding him more, and the ſtrange myſtery in which a part of his ſentiments and conduct towards her were involved, clouded the ſun-ſhine of her future hopes. Again and again did ſhe revolve his words in her thought. If he loved her, what was that

that irremoveable bar to his happineſs, which obliged him to relinquiſh her? What was that cruel honour which tore him from her? By what would it be ſullied in an union with her? Was not her family as ancient, as reſpectable as his own! Her fortune, perhaps, was not ſufficiently large. She had heard that his father had conſiderably impaired his eſtate at the gaming table, but why, if that was the caſe, did he talk of honour? Prudence would have been a proper name. Thus muſing ſhe drew near the city, which had lately been the theatre of ſcenes ſo intereſting; a ſomething painful, yet not unpleaſing, played about her heart, when ſhe reflected that it probably at that moment contained the perſon upon whom her future happineſs depended. Precarious dependence! Yet in ſpite of her ſtruggles ſhe felt that it was abſolute. Her eyes watched every paſſenger, and examined every countenance in hopes of diſcovering the only one upon which they could dwell with delight; and when the carriage paſſed where ſhe firſt beheld him, ſhe ſeemed to expect a ſecond diſaſter, and almoſt to wiſh it, in expectation of another deliverance; but not another deliverer, ſuch an obligation from any other would, in her preſent

preſent diſpoſition of mind, have been worſe than ſuffering from the want of it.

Full of theſe ideas ſhe alighted, at her uncle's, in Ely-place. She found the houſe entirely lighted up and full of company. Mrs. Sanders, being told who was below, immediately haſtened down to receive her, which ſhe did in the kindeſt manner, inſiſting upon her walking up into the drawing-room, where ſhe ſaid there were none but friends; that her habit was very handſome, and nobody could expect any thing elſe after a journey. Our heroine, unwilling to detain her from her company, complied, and was intoroduced to about a dozen people, all dreſſed in the very extreme of the faſhion, among whom ſhe inſtantly recollected Mrs. Alderman Perks and her daughter. Charlotte, who was ſitting at a card-table, jumped up the moment ſhe beheld her couſin, and flying to her with the greateſt joy, exclaimed, "Oh dear me, Miſs Aſhford, is it you? I am glad to ſee you! When did you come to town?" Before ſhe had time to anſwer, Mrs. and Miſs Perks advanced, and with great civility aſſured her how glad they were to ſee her in London. She was next preſented to a grave conſequential looking woman, very ſhowy and vulgar in her appearance—

"This,

"This, my dear (ſaid Mrs. Sanders) is my Lady Maſon, with whom I hope you will ſoon have the honour to be better acquainted, and this is Miſs Maſon." Caroline courtſied reſpectfully to both, and her ſalutation was returned in the ſame ſilent manner. She was then introduced to Lady Glymp and her three daughters, who made up the whole of the female part of the company. The men conſiſted of Mr. Sanders, Sir John Maſon, Sir Timothy Glymp, Mr. Clare, an admirer of one of the Miſs Glymps, and two other young men, who ſeemed to be better pleaſed with, and to fancy themſelves fitter for the drawing-room than the counting-houſe.

Caroline was no ſooner ſeated than one of the young men, who were cut out at the Whiſt-table, ſauntered up to her with a conceited pertneſs, and inquired if ſhe had come a long journey, to which ſhe anſwered, "Only ſeventy miles." "And pray how long do you think you might be in driving it?" ſaid he. Caroline replied, that ſhe had been upon the road all day. "You muſt have come very ſlow then (ſaid he) why it was but the other day that I and another young fellow, a buck of my acquaintance, took chaiſe to Margate, which is about the diſtance you mention; we ſet

out

out from Gracechurch-ſtreet, at ſeven—No, it was not ſeven, about ſix o'clock in the morning. Well, we ſtopped to breakfaſt at Shooter's-hill, we had ſomething again at South-Shields, we dined at Rocheſter, refreſhed ourſelves again at Canterbury, and got to Margate by ſix in the afternoon." "You were better travellers than I pretend to be." Replied our heroine. "Oh I hates to drive ſlow (anſwered he). I have got one of the beſt trotters in town, and when I rides it is very ſeldom at leſs than fourteen or fifteen miles an hour. But the ladies are ſo fearful! Pray, Ma'am, have you been at the New Riding ſchool? I think it beats either Hughes or Aſtley." Caroline anſwered, that ſhe had never ſeen either of them. He was upon the point of adding ſomething to this entertaining converſation, when Miſs Maſon, riſing from the card-table, called out, "Come, Mr. Young, you are wanted." "I am ready and willing, Ma'am," replied he; and bowing affectedly to our heroine, danced up to the table. Yes, yes, (cried Sir Timothy) Mr. Young is always ready to obey the ladies. Come, Miſs Sanders, you are the gentleman's partner." "A good hint (rejoined Sir John) what ſay you, Mrs. Sanders, have you any objection to

to a partnerſhip taking place between Mr. Young and Miſs?" This piece of wit occaſioned an univerſal laugh, and produced a great deal more of the ſame kind at the expence of Mr. Clare and Miſs Molly Glymp. Between whom, Sir John affirmed, copartnerſhip deeds were already drawn, if not ſigned and executed.

During all this merriment our heroine ſat an unconcerned liſtener. Miſs Maſon and the youngeſt Miſs Glymp, being cut out, had ſeated themſelves on the oppoſite ſide of the room, and were converſing with much ſerioufneſs, not appearing at all to attend to the diverſion which was going forward, when Mrs. Perks, coming up to Caroline, told her ſhe was ſorry to ſee young ladies ſo unſociable, and, taking her by the hand, led her acroſs the room to that ſide on which Miſs Maſon and her friend ſat in deep and earneſt diſcourſe, and telling them ſhe had brought them another companion, ſeated her by their ſide and walked back to her own place. The young ladies gave Caroline a kind of half look, and as if reſtrained by her preſence, entirely ceaſed their converſation. She ſtrove to renew it by introducing ſeveral new ſubjects but in vain, a cold yes, Mame, or no, Mame, was all ſhe could obtain, and ſhe had juſt relinquiſhed further attempts when

Mr.

Mr. Sanders coming up, took hold of her hand which he ſhook with great affectation, "Well, my dear (ſaid he) and how did you leave Sir Marmaduke and my Lady? Is your old good-for-nothing uncle, Lord Walton, dead yet? Why don't you kill half a ſcore of them and get into poſſeſſion?" "Are you related to my Lord Walton?" ſaid Miſs Maſon, turning to Caroline with a look of complacency. "Yes, (anſwered Mr. Sanders) if ſhe was any the better for it, ſhe is his great niece." He was that moment called for by Lady Glymp, but he had ſtaid long enough to procure our heroine all the civility and attention from the ladies, by whom ſhe was ſeated, that ſhe could poſſibly deſire.

Miſs Maſon ſaid ſhe ſhould be happy to ſee her and Miſs Sanders at Black-heath, where they generally reſided in the ſummer; we ſeldom come to be quite in town till near Chriſtmas, continued ſhe, and I would, by my own choice, never approach it from the birth-day till November; it is really frightful to drive along the ſtreets at this time of year, but Lady Maſon will viſit her friends, and makes ſuch a fuſs to have me with her, that rather than be teazed I ſometimes prevail upon myſelf to come. Caroline anſwered that the country was certainly preferable during the heats of ſummer.

cried

"What do you think of Tunbridge?" cried Miſs Glymp. "Why Tunbridge is tolerable (anſwered Miſs Maſon) but there is too great a mixture of company, but that indeed is the fault of all watering places. One can never be ſelect. If it was not for that I ſhould be fond of Bath; but it quite ſpoils one's pleaſure to be ſeated by one does not know who. There is nothing like genteel private parties; when you are in the houſe of a perſon of real faſhion you are ſecure from ſuch mortifications and feel quite at your eaſe."

The driving up of Lady Maſon's carriage, and her riſing to be gone, put an end to Miſs Maſon's ſpeech, and ſhe took her leave after having renewed her invitation to Black-heath, where Mrs. Sanders promiſed that her niece and daughter ſhould very ſhortly attend her.

As ſoon as they quitted the room, the whole company ran to the windows in order to look at their coach. "Is that their new coach?" cried Mrs. Sanders. "No, no, (anſwered Lady Glymp) that is the coach they had new when Sir John was Lord Mayor." "That was before he was Sir John" ſaid Mrs. Sanders. "Yes, yes (replied Mrs. Perks) he was then only plain Alderman Maſon, and I remember before he was that. It is no diſgrace to riſe from a ſmall

a ſmall beginning, but when people hold their heads ſo very high, it makes one think of it whether we will or no."—— "They may well hold their heads high (ſaid Mr. Sanders) Sir John does not riſe any day of the week worth leſs than a hundred and fifty thouſand pounds. He has been a lucky man." "I ſuppoſe (ſaid Mr. Young) Miſs Maſon is the firſt fortune in the city, ſhe's really a very fine girl." "Dear me (exclaimed Miſs Glymp) do you think ſo! in my opinion ſhe was much handſomer two years ago." "And ſhe was not ſo conceited then (cried Miſs Perks) I uſed to like her well enough, but now I can't abide to be in the room with her." "Oh ſhe thinks of nothing but Lords and Dukes; ſhe's affronted if a merchant does but look at her, to be ſure (ſaid Miſs Molly Glymp) I can tell her, let her give herſelf what airs ſhe pleaſes, her betters marry merchants every day." "Well, well (cried Mr. Sanders) it is hard if a hundred and fifty thouſand pounds won't purchaſe a Lord now they are ſo plenty; all the city ladies may hope for titles if they can but ſupply money." Here they were interrupted by a ſervant, who informed Sir Timothy and Mr. Perks that their coaches were in waiting, and after a few uſual com-

pliments and invitations, thoſe agreeable families took their leave.

As ſoon as they were alone Mrs. Sanders again welcomed her niece, ſaying, ſhe hoped this viſit would be a long one. Upon which Caroline told her and her uncle, that a miſunderſtanding having happened between her and Sir Marmaduke, ſhe was come to town with an intention of chuſing another guardian, and if he had no objection to the trouble, for the ſhort time it would be neceſſary, he would greatly oblige her by allowing her to name him. To this he readily aſſented, aſſuring her that he ſhould think nothing a trouble which could render him uſeful to the daughter of his poor dear Caroline. She then turned to Mrs. Sanders, ſaying, that the other part of her requeſt ought to be made to her, and having informed her upon what terms ſhe had lived in the houſe of Sir Marmaduke Aſhton, begged to know if ſhe could be conveniently accommodated in theirs upon the ſame. No objection was made to this propoſal by Mr. or Mrs. Sanders, and Charlotte was almoſt wild with joy when ſhe underſtood that her couſin was actually come to live with them, ſaying ſhe ſhould not mind going to the country-houſe, at Highgate, now ſhe had a companion,

panion, but it uſed to be ſo dull ſhe could not bear the name of it.

The apartment aſſigned to our heroine being only one room, and that a ſmall one, was at firſt a great inconvenience to her who had always been accuſtomed to two; however, as ſhe thought her uncle's houſe a more proper ſituation for her than being alone in a lodging, which was her only alternative, ſhe ſubmitted to neceſſity. Her couſin had a good harpſichord which rendered it uſeleſs to unpack her's, and as ſhe had no place in which to diſpoſe her books they were likewiſe left in the ſtate wherein they arrived from Aſhford-Park, and Lane's circulating library ſupplied the want of them. The form of chuſing a guardian was ſoon performed, and Sir Marmaduke, that he might entirely quit himſelf of what he eſteemed ſo troubleſome a charge, paid up the eleven thouſand pounds belonging to her that he had in his hands; which was, for the preſent, placed in thoſe of her uncle, till ſuch time as proper land-ſecurity could be had for it, he being a ſtrong anti-miniſterialiſt, and no friend to the public funds.

Thus was our heroine once more fixed in a new habitation; it was not indeed exactly what ſhe wiſhed, but it was the beſt

that at preſent offered itſelf, and ſhe reſolved to bear with its inconveniencies, at leaſt till ſhe could fix upon ſome other more eligible. The moſt unpleaſing circumſtance ſhe experienced, was the impoſſibility of being alone, or commanding an hour of leiſure at her own diſpoſal. She was conſtantly expected to viſit with her aunt, and to receive all her company. Nothing could excuſe her from making one at the card-table, which was placed as regularly as the return of the evening. If ſhe offered to abſent herſelf Mrs. Sanders thought ſhe was not well, and teazed her with ſlops and enquiries; or ſhe believed that the company to whom ſhe introduced her was not agreeable, and felt herſelf affronted in the perſons of her acquaintance. This might have been ſupported, had her mornings been unmoleſted, but Charlotte was never out of her ſight, ſhe had good-nature and a diſpoſition naturally affectionate; Caroline took great pains to improve her mind, and correct that forward petulance of manner which proceed rather from want of information than any fault of temper. She was a great admirer of her couſin's accompliſhments, and grateful for the trouble ſhe gave herſelf about her, but ſhe had no moderation in her demands, and would

follow

follow her about like a ſhadow. Caroline felt the inconvenience but had too much good nature to remove it; the pleaſure of being uſeful to her couſin was the conſideration which enabled her to endure it, for ſhe every day ſaw her improve, both in mind and perſon, the ſenſibility of the one giving delicacy and character and increaſing information to the other.

Caroline had hoped, when they were at their country-houſe, as their little villa, at Highgate, was ſtyled, that their time would be leſs devoted to the diſguſting round of ſecond-hand diſſipation in which they lived in town; but ſhe found not the ſmalleſt alteration; the neighbourhood was ſmall, but they met the oftener, and the card-table was never unfurniſhed; ſo that the only difference between this and London was, that there ſhe ſaw variety of diſagreeable people, and here met the ſame again and again through the week.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVII.

A Misfortune.

A few weeks paſſed in the manner above deſcribed. The approach of winter began to be perceivable in all the vegetable world, and Mrs. Sanders (who only lived in the country a part of the ſummer, becauſe every body who was worth thirty thouſand pounds did the ſame) began to talk with pleaſure of returning to her beloved London, to concert plans of amuſement, for the enſuing ſeaſon, when a circumſtance happened, which at once put an end to all her proſpects of happineſs, and plunged her into the depth of ſorrow, diſappointment, and deſpair. This was nothing leſs than the ſudden bankruptcy of her huſband. We have before hinted that beſides Mr. Sanders's buſineſs of a Soap-boiler, he was a dabbler in the Alley. A man who has once acquired a propenſity to gaming, of any deſcription can ſeldom anſwer for the lengths he may be tempted to go by an apparently favourable opportunity.

tunity. The eleven thouſand pounds which he had received for our heroine furniſhed the temptation, he began to ſpeculate, and led on by the proſpect of ſudden and immenſe advantage, ventured not only that but a ſum equal to his own capital. An unexpected turn in public affairs ruined his expectations, he was unable to make good his payments, and obliged to give up the little that was left for the benefit of his creditors.

The family were removed to a barely decent ready furniſhed lodging, where our heroine, though ſo great a ſufferer by the raſhneſs of her uncle, was obliged to exert all her ſpirits and reſolution, in any degree to ſupport thoſe of Mrs. Sanders and Charlotte, eſpecially the former, who was, beyond meaſure, depreſſed. The perfectly honeſt character of Mr. Sanders, previous to this unfortunate affair, gave them hopes that his certificate would be ſigned by all to whom he was indebted, eſpecially as his niece, who was his principal creditor, declared herſelf ready to do any thing for his advantage, and they had no doubt of his being able to procure credit, in order to begin buſineſs again; but, alas, how changed would be their ſituation! from independant affluence, they muſt number themſelves among

among thoſe who ſubſiſt upon the profits of the day. Nor were the real inconvenience they ſuffered thoſe which accaſioned them the greateſt pain, the thoughts of what would be ſaid by their old acquaintance, the inſolent triumph of ſome, the coolneſs of others, and the ſelf-ſatisfied pitty of all, ſtung them to the ſoul, and they were far more pained to be deprived of the appearance than the reality of happineſs.

The ſituation of our heroine was not leſs diſtreſsful than theirs, but her underſtanding was ſtronger and her mind ſupported by motives of reſolution and patience to which they were ſtrangers. Upon ſeriouſly reviewing her preſent circumſtance and future proſpects, ſhe was leſs alarmed or diſturbed than at firſt ſhe had been; the thouſand pounds in the hands of Doctor Seward was ſtill ſafe, and when the affair of her uncle's bankruptcy was ſettled ſhe expected to receive at leaſt another; with this ſhe determined to go back to Mrs. Williams's where ſuch a fortune would be affluence. She ſhould give up nothing by this retreat which affected her comfort, on the contrary, peace and leiſure were what ſhe moſt ardently deſired. The world had few charms for her, and thoſe expectations of future

future happineſs ſo naturally and uſeful to the human mind, were in her's clouded by diſappointment, and almoſt ſunk in deſpair. What at preſent gave her the greateſt uneaſineſs was the thoughts of diſturbing Mrs. Foreſter, in the ſtate of eaſe and comfort wherein ſhe had herſelf placed her. The ſum of which ſhe was now poſſeſſed would not maintain them both in it; if ſhe went down to Mrs. Williams's, Mrs. Foreſter and little Mary muſt ſeek ſhelter again at the cottage, which in the cold and damp of winter, they would find far more inconvenient than when they before reſided there. She could not endure to think of it; a few months would probably take them off her hands. She was reſolved to inquire whither it was not poſſible for her to ſupport herſelf without being a burden upon her diſtreſſed relations, for that ſhort time. The benevolence, the nobleneſs of the reſolution, flattered her natural generoſity, and ſhe determined to go immediately and conſult a couple of young women whoſe ſhop ſhe had often viſited.

They were the daughters of a clergyman, and having been genteely educated, and by his death left in an unprovided ſtate, had taken a ſhop in which they maintained

themſelves in credit and comfort, by executing works of taſte and ingenuity. They embroidered, painted upon ſilk, made and taught fillagree, cloth, wafer, and foil works, in all of which Caroline excelled, and ſhe had no doubt of obtaining from them as much employment as would enable her to ſupport herſelf till Mrs. Foreſter ſhould be provided for.

She was preparing to ſet out for Golden-ſquare, where Miſs Clarks lived, when the ſervant (for they had now only one) preſented a note to her, which ſhe ſaid was brought by a man in a rich livery, who waited for an anſwer. Upon breaking the ſeal ſhe found it to contain theſe words.

Dear Madam,

THE unexpected misfortunes of your uncle give us great concern, and we are ſorry to find that you are ſo deeply involved in them. If an apartment in my houſe will be acceptable to you, there is one at your ſervice: I have long been looking out for an unexceptionable companion for my daughter, I believe you to be ſuch, and ſhe has taken a particular liking to you. If you chuſe to come a carriage ſhall be ſent for

you

you to-morrow morning, and all things be made agreeable.

I am, Madam,

Your humble ſervant,

J. MASON.

Caroline remained ſome moments in doubt what anſwer to return to this invitation, but the perſuaſions of her aunt and couſin at laſt determined her to accept it; ſhe therefore wrote a reſpectful note in which ſhe thanked Sir John for the favourable opinion he had expreſſed of her, and the offer of his protection, which ſhe thankfully accepted, and promiſed to be in readineſs to attend Miſs Maſon at the time he had appointed.

Little preparations were neceſſary for her removal, poor Charlotte aſſiſted her in that little, and ſaw her depart with tears of unfeigned ſorrow and affection. A little before five o'clock ſhe alighted at her new reſidence, on Black-heath, and was deſired by the houſe-keeper (who met her at the door) to walk into Miſs Maſon's dreſſing-room where ſhe expected her. When ſhe entered, that young lady was ſeated upon an embroidered Ottoman, dreſſed in a chemiſe of beautiful painted gauze with ſuitable

ſuitable ornaments of the moſt delicate and expenſive kind; ſhe was playing with a ſanguine* of an uncommonly beautiful colour, it had a chain of enambled gold about its neck, to which was faſtened a piece of ſilk-cord, with a taſſel of gold at the end, by which ſhe held her favourite to prevent its eſcape.

The moment our heroine appeared ſhe flew to her in rapture, exclaiming, "Ah, my dear aſſociate! I rejoice to ſee you! how happy ſhall I be in a companion of your ſenſibility and refinement! how good you are to oblige me with your company!" Caroline thanked her for the kind ſentiments which had induced her to make ſuch a requeſt, and which had obtained for her a ſituation which ſo many would think themſelves happy to gain. "Yes, my dear (anſwered Miſs Maſon) I might certainly have choice of companions, low minded girls who have neither birth nor accompliſhments to recommend them; creatures with whom ones jewels would be unſafe; but they are not the kind for me. With Miſs Aſhford I may appear in public with propriety, I ſhall feel eaſy while I am converſing with you, and not be aſhamed to

* A ſmall Monkey.

to hear people aſk who I have got along with me. How ſhould I bluſh to hear ſuch a queſtion anſwered with, it is Miſs Sanders, the Soap-boiler, Miſs Glymp, the Brewer—Oh! horrible! it is ſufficiently mortifying that my father will ſtill keep open his banking-houſe, though as he has carried it on ſo long, and is ſo univerſally known he may juſt as well go on with it, eſpecially as the advantages of it every year add ſome thouſand pounds to my fortune, which if he lives a few years longer, and follows buſineſs with aſſiduity, will be two hundred thouſand pounds."

Our heroine found ſome difficulty in anſwering this voluble communicative young lady; ſhe might, however, have ſaved herſelf the trouble of conſidering, a liſtener being what Miſs Maſon was fond of, not a ſpeaker, ſhe was delighted to have a woman of family for her dependant and companion; for though without the ſmalleſt pretenſions to it herſelf, family conſequence was the thing in which ſhe delighted, and the grand, almoſt only wiſh of her heart, was to poſſeſs a title; this ſhe conceived to be the height of human felicity, and to purchaſe it ſhe would willingly have truſted her vaſt fortune in the hands

of

of the moſt worthleſs and diſagreeable man living.

In the dining-parlour Caroline was received by the Knight and his Lady with the utmoſt graciouſneſs. They both expreſſed great ſatisfaction at having found an intimate and conſtant companion for their daughter, ſo every way ſuitable to their wiſhes, and told her that they ſhould from that hour conſider her as an eſtabliſhed part of their family: Sir John added, that if ſhe behaved with propriety, and contributed to the happineſs of his Betſy, ſhe ſhould never want a friend, and he would make her ſuch a preſent at the end of every quarter as ſhould enable her to appear like a gentlewoman, as he underſtood ſhe was. "Aye (cried the old Lady) we have only one child for all our riches, and it is hard indeed if we cannot make her happy. I aſſure you, Miſs Aſhford, if we find you can make yourſelf agreeable to her, we ſhall never think we can pay you high enough; you ſhall have no occaſion to repent coming into our family."

Caroline was unuſed to make ſervile ſpeeches or act the dependant; ſhe ſtrove to thank Lady Maſon, but ſhe could not find words which ſhe believed would ſatisfy her without offending her own honour and ſincerity,

ſincerity, ſhe therefore only bowed in ſilence. She already felt how unfit ſhe was for the ſituation in which her perverſe deſtiny had placed her, and wiſhed ſhe had continued with her uncle Sanders's family, and ſupported herſelf by the work of her hands rather than the labour of her mind. She found it was expected that ſhe ſhould keep Miſs Maſon conſtantly chearful, that ſhe ſhould be ready to work for her, read to her, walk with her, or perform any other little office which could contribute to her eaſe and convenience. Few women were better qualified for ſuch an undertaking, for ſhe poſſeſſed talents for converſation very uncommon, could perform every kind of ornamental female work with particular elegance, and in ſuperior accompliſhments ſhe was equalled by few; but the knowledge that exertion was expected from her damped the inclination, and even power of performance, and ſhe was often graver than common becauſe ſhe knew that extraordinary gaiety was looked for. Miſs Maſon, however, appeared very well ſatisfied with her. She had conſtantly a perſon about her to whom (as ſhe uſed to ſay) ſhe was not afraid to ſpeak; one who would liſten to all her tales of diſtreſs,

treſs, and if ſhe did not flatter her foibles, by her good ſenſe often relieved her fanci-ed anxieties.

She had for ſome time paſt fancied her-ſelf in love with a young Baronet, with whom ſhe danced at the laſt Eaſter ball. He had made propoſals to her father, but being much in debt, and having a number of younger brothers and ſiſters, he de-manded ſixty thouſand pound to be paid down, and the old Knight refuſed to ad-vance more than forty. This his daughter conſidered as the height of cruelty, and ſhe would often when alone with our he-roine lament herſelf as the moſt unfortu-nate girl upon earth. She would willing-ly have accompanied him to the North, but he had never made her ſuch a propo-ſal, and ſhe could not mention it firſt.— The obſtinacy of her father was ſupported, not only by his knowledge of the value of money, but his deſire of marrying his daughter to a great Dutch merchant, worth three hundred thouſand pounds: this match he would often preſs, repreſenting the im-menſe advantages of it in compariſon to one with a needy ſpend-thrift, who had only a feather to preſent her with in ex-change

change for her bags of ſolid gold. The mention of this affair would at any time throw her into hyſterics; ſhe would upbraid her father with an intention to make her miſerable—of killing her; and the conteſts generally ended in a promiſe from the old man that he would ſee what could be done. Theſe promiſes, however, had been ſo often repeated that they began to loſe their effect, and it is uncertain to what lengths of imprudence her impatience and reſentment would have led her, had not the perſuaſions and arguments of her new friend in ſome degree abated and regulated her paſſions.

The taſk of perpetually combating folly, however uſeful, is irkſome and fatiguing, and the ſenſible intelligent mind of Caroline felt its full effect. She was often upon the point of relinquiſhing a ſituation ſo unpleaſant, but the fear of encountering difficulties of a ſtill more diſagreeable nature, and the comfortable reflection that a few months would releaſe her from it, had hitherto enabled her to endure it, when the arrival of Mrs. Meadows, an intimate Bath friend of Miſs Maſon's, from whom ſhe had long expected a viſit, eaſed her of much

much fatigue and rendered her ſituation more tolerable.

Mrs. Meadows was young, handſome, and ſprightly: ſhe had been married while a girl to a man of leaſt at double her age, and in no reſpect qualified to engage her affection; after a few years of jealouſly on his ſide, and averſion on hers, they parted; he continued to live at his family manſion with his horſes and hounds, while ſhe fled about the kingdom, in purſuit of her only idol, Pleaſure. Her ſummers were generally ſpent at watering-places, where her perſon and ſituation (of all others the moſt diſadvantageous to female virtue and honour) drew around her a croud of admirers. She had, however, by flirting with all a like, and ſhewing particular favour to none, eſcaped every thing but general ſcandal; no one could point out any ſingle inſtance of her miſconduct, though every one was ready to blame her whole behaviour. She was received with tranſport by Miſs Maſon, and a few days after her arrival the whole family removed to town, which now, it being the latter end of Oct. began to fill pretty faſt.

The

The very day after our heroine's arrival, in London, ſhe viſited her uncle and his family; ſhe found them ſtill in the ſtate wherein ſhe had left them ſix weeks before, but in hopes of ſhortly having their affairs ſettled in ſuch a manner as to give them a proſpect of beginning life again with better ſucceſs. They appeared quite reconciled to their ſituation, and no longer to experience thoſe diſturbances of thought which they felt when ſhe laſt parted from them, ſo naturally and happily does the mind accommodate itſelf to the different ſituations and viſſitudes to which human life is ſubject.

Upon her return Caroline found the two friends in earneſt converſation; they were ſpeaking of a gentleman who had juſt paid a viſit to Mrs. Meadows, whom they mentioned in a high ſtrain of commendation. "I think (ſaid Miſs Maſon) Col. Vincent is one of the handſomeſt men I ever beheld." "And he is ſo very pleaſing (anſwered Mrs. Meadows) ſo perfectly the man of faſhion. Then he is the beſt tempered man in the world, and has all the warmth, generoſity, and bravery of a hero." "I know but one man (replied Miſs

Miſs Maſon, with a ſigh) who is in my opinion more agreeable." "That one is, I muſt acknowledge, a ſtranger to me (anſwered Mrs. Meadows) if I was a ſingle woman, and worth two hundred thouſand pounds, I ſhould know how to beſtow it." "Good Heavens! (exclaimed Miſs Maſon) and would you actually beſtow it upon a plain Mr. ?" "Why not (cried her friend) what amazing happineſs, my dear creature, do you expect in the poſſeſſion of a title? Believe me, before you two I can ſpeak in confidence; I had rather be the beloved wife of Col. Vincent than the firſt Ducheſs in the kingdom." "I think (replied Miſs Maſon) a title is an agreeable decoration, if it was only that it takes one up to the top of the room inſtead of dangling at the bottom among people one cannot venture to ſpeak to. But excluſive of this my affections are engaged beyond a poſſibility of recal or exchange." A deep ſigh ſucceeded theſe words, and ſhe reclined upon the ſofa on which they were ſeated in the moſt elegant and languiſhing attitude.

She had ſcarce pronounced theſe words when the drawing-room door opened, and Sir

Sir John entered with looks of the moſt conſequential pleaſure. "Well, Betſy, (exclaimed he) I muſt have no more ſighing and whining; no more crying after your Sir Williams and Sir Harrys; I have got a Lord for thee, my girl, a Peer of the realm, none of your paltry Scotch or Iriſh titles, but of Great-Britain. What ſay you of being Counteſs of D. hey!" "Lord, Sir John (cried ſhe, her face crimſoned all over with ſurprize) how abrupt you are! ſure a little preparation might have been judged neceſſary before ſuch a circumſtance was divulged! had you communicated your intelligence to Mrs. Meadows or Miſs Aſhford, they would have broke it to me by degrees, and not have ſhocked me in this manner." "Shocked you! (exclaimed Sir John) zounds, what would the girl be at? Shocked, indeed—at the thoughts of being a Counteſs! Why I know thou wouldſt give thy eyes for ſuch a title. Have I not heard thee ſay, myſelf, that thou wouldſt marry a Duke though he were a negro? ſo I fancy a handſome young Viſcount won't make you faint." "Dear me, Sir John (cried ſhe) you ſhould not repeat what one ſays in the moment of levity. You know how

how much I have encouraged Sir Charles Woodhouſe; how can I ever think of any other?" "Nay (replied her father, if that is the caſe I have done, if you can fancy none but that ſcape-grace, I muſt let Lord D. know that you are engaged, and there's an end to the matter." "Lord, Papa, you are ſo haſty! (cried ſhe) if one wiſhed to obey you and get the better of a weak inclination, you allow one no time." There is no time to be allowed (anſwered the Knight) my Lord expects an anſwer to-night, and if his addreſſes are received he will be hear to-morrow morning, and it will be your own fault if you are not a Counteſs before the week is out. I have promiſed him fifty thouſand down; there's for you, Betſy! Ought you not to be a good girl and make yourſelf happy to reward me for parting with ſuch a ſum?" "I acknowledge my obligations, Sir (anſwered ſhe) and am reſolved to act in every thing as you ſhall think proper." "That's a good girl (replied Sir John) then I ſhall tell my Lord that he may come. I need not tell you to put on your finery, I warrant that will be done without my telling. I leave you to conſult one another, you women underſtand theſe affairs

fairs beſt." So ſaying he nodded to each and left the room.

The emotion of our heroine was almoſt as great as that of Miſs Maſon, when ſhe heard her old lover Lord D. announced as the deſtined future huſband of a city heir-reſs. She eaſily conceived that a faſhionable derangement in his finances might have rendered ſuch a ſtep convenient, and did not wonder that ſo immenſe a fortune as that of Miſs Maſon, ſhould attract his attention? but that ſhe ſhould be thus repeatedly thrown in his way, in circumſtances ſo awkward and embaraſſing, filled her with confuſion and uneaſineſs. She feared, leaſt ſomething of the ſame kind ſhould happen here as at Aſhford-park, that is, that ſhe ſhould be the means of diſturbing the expected happineſs of a perſon who profeſſed herſelf her friend. She reſolved, however, to be upon her guard in every look and action, by which means ſhe hoped to check any improper attentions from Lord D. ſhould he be imprudent enough to pay her any ſuch.

As for Miſs Maſon, having entirely conquered her paſſion for Sir Charles Woodhouſe,

houſe, the remainder of the day paſſed in a delirium of happineſs, in planning parties for public places, to which my Lord was to eſcort her; in chuſing wedding clothes, giving rich liveries, fitting up houſes, and regulating a retinue. And ſhe retired at night to dream of titles, plate, jewels, equipage, and the charming extravaganza of high life.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVIII.

The Faſhionable Lover.

THE following morning Miſs Maſon was up ſooner than uſual; before eleven ſhe ſent her maid into Caroline's apartment, to requeſt that ſhe would favour her with her advice about her dreſs. Our heroine was reading, as ſhe had been for more than two hours, when this meſſage was brought; ſhe immediately laid aſide her book, and went to attend the important conſultation.

Upon entering Miſs Maſon's room, ſhe ſaw ſeveral elegant morning dreſſes expoſed

to view, upon which ſhe was gazing with the moſt unreſolved countenance, not able to fix upon one for her appearance this important morning. "Come hither, my dear Aſhford, give me your opinion, which of thoſe dreſſes ſhall I put on? I have a high opinion of your taſte. If I could but look like you do in that dimity! Don't you think theſe are all frightful? I wiſh I had time to ſend to Chambaud, ſhe would have got me ſomething tolerable. How provoking it is that my clouded tiffany is not come home!" "In my opinion (anſwered Caroline) that India dreſs is extremely elegant, and particularly becoming to you; and ſuppoſe you put on the handkerchief and cap that you had from Paris, I think they will ſuit it exactly, they are in the ſame ſtile." "So I will (exclaimed Miſs Maſon) that will do exactly! You have really more taſte than any body I ever met with! The firſt time I go to court, I am reſolved to be dreſſed entirely by your directions." Caroline thanked her with a ſmile, for ſuch a proof of her confidence, ſaying ſhe ſhould take particular care to exert all her judgment upon ſuch an occaſion. "Nay, you will have yourſelf to decorate too, anſwered Miſs Maſon, for I am reſolved you ſhall be preſented

preſented along with me; your family and connections make it very proper, and I would have the world know that my friend and companion is of conſequence enough to receive ſuch an honour."

Mrs. Meadows now entered, and happening greatly to admire the dreſs ſhe had choſen, and declaring ſhe would look quite irreſiſtible, put her into ſo good a humour, that it was put on without either fretting or delay, and rather before twelve o'clock, they all walked down to breakfaſt, perfectly ſatisfied with the execution of this grand affair.

Though Sir John and his Lady indulged their daughter with her own hours, it was their cuſtom to breakfaſt exactly at nine, having, in the younger part of their lives, been uſed to early ones, as well as to many other rational and comfortable practices, which, in compliance with her humours, they had given up. The three friends, therefore, ſat down to that repaſt without any one to partake or interrupt their chat, which entirely turned upon Lord D——, and the probable conſequence of his expected viſit, till a ſervant delivered a note

to Mrs. Meadows, which, as ſhe read, the colour fluſhed in her cheeks, and ſhe put it up, without mentioning any thing of its contents. A few moments afterwards, ſhe propoſed to Miſs Maſon their going that evening to the Opera, to which her friend readily conſented, provided Lord D—— ſhould happen to be diſengaged, and would go with them; adding that ſhe did not think it would be proper, in her ſituation, to appear in public attended by any other perſon. Our heroine ſmiled, and Mrs. Meadows raillied her upon her very extraordinary attention to propriety, ſaying, if that is the caſe, you muſt ſpare Miſs Aſhford for one evening, I can procure twenty beaus in town, and we'll return after the Opera is over, for I have ſet my heart upon going, and am reſolved not to be diſappointed, if I venture alone. Juſt as ſhe had ſpoken theſe words, a thundering at the door announced the arrival of ſome viſitor of conſequence. The ladies ſtarted up, and hurried into Miſs Maſon's dreſſing-room, which had been put into the higheſt order, for the reception of her expected gueſt. She flew to the glaſs, took a tranſient view of herſelf, then ſinking into a fanteuil, waited with a fluttering heart, for his appearance.

In

In a few moments his Lordſhip was announced, and entered the room attended by Sir John, who in a manner he meant to be quite the thing, led him to his daughter. He thanked her for the honour ſhe had done him in admitting his viſit, with that eaſy reſpect and gallantry which a man of the ton can aſſume, when he ſtands in need of a certain number of thouſand pounds, which the perſon to whom it is addreſſed, has in her power to beſtow upon him. Having finiſhed his compliments to her, he turned to Mrs. Meadows and Caroline, each of whom he favoured with a reſpectable bow, without expreſſing the leaſt ſurprize at the ſight of the latter, or appearing at all embarraſſed by her preſence; he only inquired when ſhe left Aſhford Park, and whether Sir Marmaduke and his family would be in town that winter? She anſwered that it was three months ſince ſhe had left the country, and that ſhe was entirely ignorant of any of her uncle's deſigns.

Miſs Maſon was not at all ſurprized to find that our heroine was acquainted with Lord D——, knowing that ſhe had relations of equal rank; on the contrary, ſhe was

was pleaſed that he ſhould find a woman of faſhion, whom he knew to be ſuch, in her houſe. But when ſhe obſerved him addreſs his whole converſation to her, ſhe began to feel herſelf neglected, and tried a thouſand little affected airs to attract his attention. His Lordſhip aſked our heroine if ſhe had ſeen Mrs. Murray, ſince they met in her apartment, and upon her anſwering in the negative, he told her that he had entirely loſt her favour, and that he verily believed ſhe would leave her fortune to the people who took care of her houſe, for ſhe now abſolutely refuſed to ſee any of her relations; adding, that Lady Walton had been refuſed admiſſion, and none of the Aſhfords were permitted to come near her. She accuſes us (continued he) of having endeavoured to cheat and deceive her, and vows that ſhe will diſpoſe of her riches in ſuch a manner as ſhall vex and mortify us all.

During this converſation Miſs Maſon ſat with great impatience, till being quite weary of expecting her turn of attention, ſhe reſolved to put an end to it, and at the ſame time inform her lover (as ſhe accounted him) on what footing Caroline was in the

the family. Complaining, therefore, of a little head ake, Miſs Aſhford (ſaid ſhe, with an affected negligence) reach me that ſmelling bottle. Meaning one which lay upon the toilet on the oppoſite ſide of the room. This was a liberty ſhe had never taken before, neitheir when they were alone or in company: our heroine heſitated a moment, then ſtepping acroſs the room with an eaſy negligence, was about to have brought it, telling her at the ſame time that as ſhe was not well, ſhe muſt be indulged, but Lord D—— ſtarting up, inſiſted upon her keeping her ſeat, ſaying to Miſs Maſon, with a look that reproached her indelicacy, that ſuch an office would to *him* be an honour. Notwithſtanding the look and emphaſis with which he ſpoke, ſhe received it from him with much graciouſneſs. Her manner reminded him of the buſineſs upon which he came, which was nothing leſs important then falling in love; had he been viſiting a woman of quality with a matrimonial intention, ſuch a ceremony would have been wholly unneceſſary, but with the daughter of a citizen he knew it would be inſiſted upon. Forcing himſelf therefore from the point of attraction, he began to careſs the ſanguine which his miſtreſs held on her lap,

telling

telling her that the tenderneſs ſhe laviſhed upon that little animal was enough to render a lover uneaſy. This ſhe conſidered as an elegant declaration of his paſſion, and a few compliments which ſucceeded put her into ſuch a perfect good humour that ſhe appeared to have wholly forgot her headach, and propoſed the party to the Opera. His Lordſhip readily offered to attend them; he ſaid, he was engaged at dinner, but promiſed to ſlip away immediately as ſoon as it was over and call for them; adding, that he hoped they would honour his box. Miſs Maſon ſmiled and bowed her aſſent, but Mrs. Meadows begged, if it was not quite diſagreeable to them, that they would indulge her by ſitting in the pit; Lord D. aſſured her every part of the houſe would, with ſuch a party, be the ſame to him, and the pit was accordingly fixed upon. The Viſcount then took his leave, promiſing to wait upon them again at the proper hour.

He was no ſooner gone and Miſs Maſon and her friend had paſſed a few encomiums on his perſon and addreſs, than the great work of dreſſing, which had ended not more than two hours before, again commenced, and freſh conſultations were held upon

upon the important ſubject. Caroline declared herſelf quite at liberty to adviſe and aſſiſt as ſhe was in her own perſon unintereſted in the preparation, being reſolved not to make one in the party. As Miſs Maſon was properly eſcorted, ſhe was not at all diſpleaſed by the abſence of one who took up too much of that attention which ſhe wiſhed, and thought ſhe had a right wholly to engroſs. They were with difficulty ready dreſſed by dinner, and ſoon after it was removed Lord D.'s coach, in which they had promiſed to go, drove up to the door. As ſoon as his Lordſhip had handed in Miſs Maſon and Mrs. Meadows, he aſked where Miſs Aſhford was, to which the former lady replied, with a toſs of her head, that Caroline did not always go with her to public places.

When our heroine was alone, a ſerious unpleaſant train of reflections took poſſeſſion of her mind. She reviewed her paſſed life, and ſighed over that happy part of it which was ſpent under the dear regretted protection of a paternal roof. The mortifying viciſſitudes ſhe had ſince experienced next preſented themſelves, and laſtly, her preſent uncertain and irkſome ſituation.

Such was her entertainment when the ladies returned. Lord D——— had an ingagement for the evening, which prevented his ſtaying ſupper, to which he was much preſſed by Sir John and his Lady, who returned him many unneceſſary thanks for the care he had taken of their Betſy. He made polite returns to all their fine ſpeeches, without appearing by any change of countenance, to think them abſurd, and took leave with no other compliment to our heroine, than a very ſlight bow.

The ladies were full of the agreeable evening they had ſpent, and Caroline underſtood that Colonel Vincent had been of the party. Miſs Maſon began already to act the Counteſs; talked of people of the firſt rank as her intimates and equals, and diverted herſelf extremely, at the mortification her preſence, attended by Lord D———, appeared to give Sir William Woodhouſe, who, ſhe ſaid, looked frightful, and more like a fool than any creature ſhe ever beheld; adding, that when he came to ſpeak to her, ſhe really could not help laughing in his face.

The next morning the ſubject was renewed, and appeared to afford, if poſſible, more

more amuſement than the night before; when Miſs Maſon's gaiety was, for the preſent, clouded by her friend Mrs. Meadows, who informed her, ſhe muſt, in a few days, put an end to her preſent viſit, being under an engagement to join a party of friends in the South of France, where they purpoſed to ſpend the winter, and return again to England in the ſpring.

It was in vain that her friend made the ſtrongeſt oppoſition to this ſcheme; ſhe aſſured her the plan had been laid, and her promiſe given, before her arrival at Blackheath; that the party conſiſted of her particular friends, and ſhe could by no means think of diſappointing them.

This piece of information greatly damped the ſpirits of Miſs Maſon; ſhe had been all her life too much indulged in every wiſh, to endure the ſmalleſt contradiction to her inclinations with patience. After telling Mrs. Meadows that ſhe thought ſhe had poſſeſſed one friend, but found ſhe was miſtaken, ſhe left the room in tears of anger and diſappointment.

The door was no ſooner cloſed, than Mrs. Meadows began to animadvert upon the

the caprice and childiſhneſs of Miſs Maſon's temper, which ſhe attributed partly to weakneſs of underſtanding, and partly to a bad education. "Do you know, (continued ſhe) that ſhe has taken it into her head to be jealous of Lord D—— and you. She ſays ſhe is ſure there has been more between you than a common acquaintance; which opinion is ſtrengthened by a report his valet has ſpread in the family; namely, that his Lord offered to marry you the laſt time he was at Aſhford Park, and that it would actually have been a match, but for ſome quarrel in the family. This account her maid has carried her, and ſhe is now only waiting for ſome excuſe to part with you. The ſmalleſt will do, for ſhe is determined upon it."

"She need not trouble herſelf to find excuſes (replied Caroline, a little warmly) had ſhe expreſſed to me the moſt diſtant wiſh, it would have had all the effect of a formal diſmiſſion. I am greatly obliged to you for ſaving me ſuch a mortification, which I will ſecure myſelf againſt, by leaving the houſe this very day."

"I by no means blame your reſolution, (anſwered Mrs. Meadows) but where will you

you go? Are you provided with any eligible ſituation when you leave this family? I have been informed of your late misfortune, as well as your intirely dependant circumſtances, by Miſs Maſon, who gave the whole detail to Lord D——, the evening we went to the Opera, at the ſame time telling him that when ſhe took you into her protection, you had no bread to live upon, and with the reſt of your relations, had taken ſhelter in a wretched alley, up four pair of ſtairs."

"My uncle's family, with whom I lived (anſwered Caroline) have a firſt floor, in Red-Lyon Street, Holborn. Their circumſtances, however, are very diſtreſsful, and I cannot think of taking from them the ſmalleſt part of their little, eſpecially as after what has paſſed, they may think themſelves obliged to ſupport me."

"Believe me and ſo they are, in my opinion (anſwered Mrs. Meadows.) I think you have a right to divide their laſt bit of bread with them."

"Whatever may be my right, (replied Caroline) I have no inclination to do it. They

They never wiſhed or intended to injure me; on the contrary, I have every reaſon to believe myſelf greatly beloved by them; and if at preſent I can give them no aſſiſtance, at leaſt I will not be a burthen to them."

"Come along with me (ſaid Mrs. Meadows) the journey I am about to take will, in all probability, be a pleaſant one; I ſhall eſteem myſelf happy in ſuch a companion, and will omit nothing in my power to render your ſituation comfortable."

Caroline thanked her in the warmeſt terms for her friendly propoſal. She was fond of traveling, and next to Italy, ſhe ſhould like to viſit the South of France, a fine climate was her delight. Mrs. Meadows was ſenſible, and apparently good-natured. At all events, three or four months would ſoon paſs, and by the time ſhe returned, her little fortune would, in all probability, be her own. She reſolved to venture, and after a minute or two of conſideration, anſwered, that ſhe would attend her.

Mrs. Meadows appeared highly pleaſed with her reſolution, and Caroline retired

to

to her apartment, to put all things in readineſs for her removal from Great-Georges-Street. She did not ſee Miſs Maſon till dinner, when ſhe told her a circumſtance had happened which obliged her to take leave of her that very afternoon.

"What (ſaid the old lady) are you going to leave Betſy? I would have you conſider of it, Miſs Aſhford. You will not find it eaſy to get into ſuch another family; but people never know when they are well till they are worſe."

"Have you any thing to complain of, (ſaid the Knight.) Have you not been treated like a gentlewoman?"

"I have no complaints, Sir, (anſwered our Heroine) but I muſt in ſome degree conſult my own convenience, which at preſent obliges me to take this ſtep." Miſs Maſon was entirely ſilent, and when Caroline begged leave to ſend a ſervant to call a hackney-coach, ſhe made not the leaſt oppoſition to her intention. He ſoon returned to let her know that it was

ready,

ready, and all her things put into it. Upon which ſhe aroſe, and taking a formal leave of the whole family, ſtepped in, and directed the coachman to drive to Red-Lyon Street.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXIX.

An Expedition.

SHE found her relations ſtill in the ſame ſituation, but in hopes that it would ſoon alter for the better. They were much concerned to hear of her having left Miſs Maſon, and almoſt frighted at the thought of her going abroad. Mrs. Sanders declared if any misfortune befel her, ſhe ſhould never be happy in her mind any more, and Charlotte wept to think that the ſea would divide her from her dear couſen. Caroline endeavoured to reaſon them out of fears ſo ill grounded, and aſſured them that ſhe looked forward to her expected journey as a very great pleaſure, and what ſhe ſhould much prefer to ſtaying in England. That evening ſhe received a note from

from Mrs. Meadows, to inform her that ſhe had reſolved upon leaving London the very next day but one, and would call for her by ten in the morning.

At the hour appointed, that lady, in a hired poſt chaiſe and four, attended by a ſervant in, and another out of livery, ſtoped at the door of the houſe in which Mr. Sanders lodged, and our Heroine having taken an affectionate leave of him and his family, immediately joinining her, they drove away at a conſiderable ſpeed, taking the road to Dover. She found in Mrs. Meadows, now that they were no longer encumbered with the affected trifling of Miſs Maſon, a lively, ſenſible companion, who knew much of the world and its follies, which in the general courſe of her conduct, ſhe countenanced and complied with; but in her better and unimpaſſioned judgment, deſpiſed. The weather being remarkably open and fine, their journey was extremely pleaſant, and they embarked in the higheſt ſpirits, being joined, at Dover, by two female ſervants, who had arrived from town, that morning, in a ſtage coach.

During

During their paſſage, our Heroine and her new patroneſs appeared every hour more and more pleaſed with each other; the courage of Mrs. Meadows, which ſeemed intirely unmoved by the proſpects of any difficulty they might encounter, removed, in a great meaſure, the fears of her companion. She laughed at the ideal neceſſity, as ſhe called it, of always being eſcorted by men; as if, ſhe ſaid, a woman of ſenſe, who had money at her command, and ſervants to attend her, could not take care of herſelf; but muſt, like a child, be perpetually dangled after, for fear ſhe ſhould fall down, or cut her fingers. Upon Caroline's enquiring ſome of the particulars of her intended rout, ſhe told her ſhe did not mean to go immediately to the place of general rendezvous, but to make a ſhort viſit to the Counteſs Du Barrongue, who was her diſtant relation, and lived within twelve miles of Paris, in which ſhe had a magnificent houſe; but contrary to the general cuſtom in France, ſhe and the Count ſpent almoſt the whole year in the country. There, continued Mrs. Meadows, I hope to be joined by my friend Colonel Vincent, who will ſee us ſafe to the end of our journey.

Caroline was extremely ſurpriſed to hear of Mrs. Meadows being followed to the Continent by a perſon for whom ſhe had more than once heard her profeſs ſo dangerous a preference. She remonſtrated againſt her imprudence in having permitted him to take ſuch a ſtep. Mr. Meadows laughed at firſt, at what ſhe called Caroline's prudery, but finding her very ſerious in her opinion, ſhe aſſured her that if ſhe knew the character of the Colonel, it would intirely remove her ſcruples. It is, continued ſhe, of the moſt excellent and uncommon kind, and I ſhall eſteem myſelf as ſafe under his care, as if I was ſurrounded by a whole guard of Spaniſh Duenas. Caroline replied, that though the honour of Colonel Vincent, and her own conſcious integrity, might be a ſufficient ſecurity againſt impertinance or inſult, they could hardly be ſo univerſally acknowledged as to ſtop the voice of public cenſure, and ſhe muſt, on ſuch an occaſion, expect its cries to be of the loudeſt kind; adding, that if the circumſtances of his being to make one of the party, had been communicated to her before they ſailed, ſhe ſhould certainly have declined the honour of attending her.

Much

Much altercation took place between them upon this ſubject, and Mrs. Meadows at laſt appeared convinced, by the arguments of her friend, that ſhe had been guilty of a real imprudence. She promiſed to write to the Colonel the moment ſhe landed, and forbid his coming, a promiſe with which our Heroine appeared ſatisfied, and ſhe accordingly wrote as ſoon as they got on ſhore. They travelled with as much expedition as the badneſs of the carriage would allow, till they arrived at the houſe, or rather palace, of the Count Du Barrongue, which was an elegant and ſtately edifice, ſituated in the fineſt part of one of the fineſt countries in the world.

They were received by the Counteſs, her huſband being upon buſineſs in a diſtant province, rather with politeneſs, than affection or pleaſure. Her coldneſs did not appear to diſturb Mrs. Meadows, but ſenſibly hurt our Heroine, who would have perſuaded her to leave the houſe the very next day; but ſhe ſaid it was the Counteſs's manner, exactly what ſhe expected, and that ſhe ſhould continue there as long as it ſuited her convenience. A ſingle day was ſufficient to convince Caroline of the falſity of

of this account; the Counteſs's manner being particularly kind and obliging to all about her, by every one of whom ſhe ſeemed exceedingly beloved, particularly by a young lady who lived with her as a companion, and who was her diſtant relation. All her coldneſs ſeemed to be reſerved for her new gueſts. She expreſſed much wonder at their taking ſo long a journey with only the protection of domeſtics, and once or twice hinted her diſlike to all violations of family duties, and the diſgraceful ſtate of voluntary widowhood. Miſs Dunford, that being the name of her young friend, behaved to them, eſpecially to Caroline, with more attention. She appeared particularly pleaſed with her, and took every opportunity of converſing with, and ſhewing her marks of kindneſs, which were more than uſually acceptable in her preſent ſituation, when ſhe was diſſatisfied with herſelf, and every thing about her.

She blamed her own haſty want of conſideration, in accepting Mrs. Meadows's invitation to accompany her in ſo long a journey, without a further knowledge of her character, or the advice of ſome friend who

who knew the world better than herſelf; ſhe might have conſulted Doctor Seward; he would have pointed out the impropriety of her friends ſituation and conduct. She admired the Counteſs Du Barrongue; the more ſhe ſaw of her, the more was ſhe convinced that Mrs. Meadows would not be treated by her with ſo little conſideration, had ſhe not deſerved to forfeit her eſteem; and ſhe ſtrove by every means in her power, without further leſſening that lady, to convince the Counteſs that ſhe never had been a partaker of her follies. Theſe endeavours appeared to be in ſome degree ſucceſsful. The elegant ſimplicity of her manners, the unaffected rectitude of her ſentiments, the ſtrength of her underſtanding, and apparent goodneſs of her heart, all tended to change the opinion which ſhe at firſt ſeemed to have formed of her, and ſhe began upon every occaſion to diſtinguiſh her by more of that benevolent friendlineſs which appeared ſo natural to her diſpoſition, than ſhe had before favoured her with.

One morning when Mrs. Meadows and Miſs Dunford were walking in the gardens, the Counteſs aſked Caroline how long ſhe had —

had been acquinted with the former; her anſwer led to further enquiries, and ended in a ſhort detail of all the events of her life. This ſhe told in a ſummary way, without naming particular perſons, except her near relations, and wholly omitting thoſe circumſtances which did moſt honour to her charms or benevolence. The Counteſs appeared much intereſted and affected by the account of ſo many viſſitudes and misfortunes having befallen ſo young and lovely a creature. She no longer blamed, but lamented her connection with Mrs. Meadows, who, though her relation, was, ſhe ſaid, by no means a proper director for a young woman of honour and virtue. She then aſked her if ſhe had not a brother at that time abroad upon his travels; and upon her anſwering in the affirmative, told her that he had been recommended to the Count and herſelf, by the father of Miſs Dunford, who then lived in London, and had a few months paſt, favoured them with his company for ſome days. Caroline had never heard of the name of Dunford, and could not help wondering by what means he, who before he left England, had ſtirred ſo little from Broomfield, became acquainted with him.

When

When Mrs. Meadows and Miſs Dunford returned from their walks, the Counteſs addreſſed the latter with a ſmile, ſaying, "Do you know, my dear, that I have made a diſcovery; Miſs Aſhford is ſiſter to the gentleman of that name, who was recommended to us by your father: you know who I mean, Harriot, continued ſhe, archly." "Dear me, (exclaimed Miſs Dunford, bluſhing exceſſively) is it poſſible, Madam, you can be Mr. Aſhford's ſiſter? I have heard him ſay, indeed, that he has one, but I always underſtood that ſhe was under the protection of relations, from whom ſhe had large expectations." "Miſs Aſhford (anſwered the Counteſs) has juſt favoured me with an account of the accident by which ſhe has been thrown out of that protection. Her hiſtory of her family and connections being exactly ſimilar with that given us by her brother, immediately convinced me that they muſt belong to the ſame family." Miſs Dunford then aſked ſeveral queſtions, particularly what was become of the family who had taken up their reſidence with Lord W———, a little before Mr. Aſhford left England. And upon being informed that the old lady was married to that nobleman, ſhe exclaimed, that

is exactly what I expected; I told Mr. Aſhford what would happen. But when ſhe heard of the uſe ſhe had made of her power and influence over her huſband, ſhe appeared uncommonly affected, and her countenance expreſſed the utmoſt diſdain and reſentment. Caroline, who attributed this concern to the intereſt ſhe kindly took in her welfare, felt the moſt lively gratitude, and a liking which ſhe had conceived for this amiable and pleaſing girl, began from that moment, to ſtrengthen into affection and friendſhip. From that time the Counteſs continued to treat our heroine with the moſt flattering diſtinction, ſeeming anxious, by her preſent kindneſs, to make her amends for the paſt neglect ſhe had ſuffered in her houſe. She warmly declared againſt her proceeding with Mrs. Meadows to the end of her intended journey, telling her, that though ſhe was ignorant of whom the party ſhe was going to join conſiſted, ſhe had too much reaſon to believe it would not be compoſed of ſuch perſons as would prove agreeable to a woman of her delicacy and underſtanding; adding, that there was a family of her particular friends then at Paris, who would ſet out on their return for England in about a fortnight; that ſhe would

would take care to recommend her to them in ſuch a manner, as would not only induce them to afford her their protection till their arrival in London, but if ſhe choſe it, engage them to place her in an eligible ſituation, better ſuited to her merits and diſpoſition.

The gratitude of our heroine was without bounds, ſhe informed the Counteſs that ſhe hoped, in a few months to be poſſeſſed of a ſum ſufficient to maintain her in comfort and independence, and that till then ſhe would thankfully accept ſuch a ſituation as that ſhe mentioned; upon which the Counteſs deſired her to be quite eaſy, for it ſhould be her buſineſs to ſee that ſuch a one was provided for her; that ſhe knew ſhe might depend upon her friend, Mrs. Lane, whoſe connections put it often in her power to be uſeful to her acquaintance, and whoſe diſpoſition rendered every act of kindneſs a pleaſure to her.

Some days after theſe aſſurances had been received, the whole family were ſeated round a working-table; the Counteſs was embroidering the border of a ſkirt, Miſs Dunford weaving lace, Mrs. Meadows

playing with a ſquirrel, and our heroine reading a comedy of Moliere's, when a ſervant entered the room and informed Mrs. Meadows that an Engliſh gentleman had juſt ſtopped at the gate and ordered him to inform her that his name was Vincent. Caroline had mentioned to the Counteſs ſome apprehenſions of her attachment to that gentleman; the moment, therefore, that ſhe heard his name announced ſhe gave her a look of the moſt piercing and expreſſive kind. Her face was covered with crimſon, not the artleſs bluſh of ſenſibility and innocence, but the deep one of guilty pleaſure and apprehenſion. Recovering in a moment—"Have I your permiſſion to aſk my friend in for a few moments (ſaid ſhe) he is a gentleman of unexceptionable character, and being nearly related to ſome of thoſe intimates with whom I mean to paſs the winter, intends to join them for a few weeks only, and is, I ſuppoſe, polite enough to call upon us in his way, to offer himſelf as our eſcort for the remainder of our journey.

"He has taken a conſiderable round, in order to pay his compliment (replied the Counteſs)

Counteſs) but requeſt the gentleman to walk in (continued ſhe, turning to the ſervant) I cannot let any perſon remain at my gate who belongs to a preſent part of my family." She ſpoke theſe words with a ſtately coldneſs which would have awed any one leſs bleſſed with convenient effrontery than was her relation, who with great compoſure thanked her for her politeneſs, and riſing, walked towards the door, in order to be ready to receive her friend. The door opened, and the Colonel entering, flew to Mrs. Meadows, and taking her by the hand, which ſhe held out to him—"My dear Madam (ſaid he) how ſhall I expreſs my felicity in ſeeing you!" At the ſame inſtant Caroline and he happening to caſt their eyes upon each other, the words, Miſs Aſhford and Capt. Weſt, were repeated with the greateſt aſtoniſhment. Captain Weſt! (exclaimed the Counteſs and Miſs Dunford, in the ſame moment) is it Captain Weſt?

The Colonel had by this time approached our heroine: "I do not wonder at your ſurprize, my dear Madam, if you have neither heard of my promotion or change of name. The firſt was his Majeſty's

jeſty's pleaſure. The ſecond was a whim of an old uncle of my father's, who having ſpent his whole life in hoarding a fortune, choſe to perpetuate his folly as far as poſſible, by bequeathing his name together with the poſſeſſion of it, both of which I at preſent acknowledge as my own." "I am glad, Sir, (anſwered Caroline) that his whim has been of ſo much advantage to you." "But how, Miſs Aſhford, (continued he) how ſhall I apologize for the folly, the madneſs of which I was guilty the laſt time I had the happineſs of meeting you? Yet I have done all in my power to deſerve forgiveneſs. Indeed I did not, till that evening, know how deeply I had unintentionally been the means of injuring you."

"What do you mean, Sir; (ſaid Caroline) before this excellent lady, who honours me with her friendſhip, you may ſpeak as freely as if we were alone; what injury do you ſpeak of?" "It is an affair I cannot explain, (anſwered he) without expoſing the injuſtice of a mother; but the guilty deſerve ſhame; at all events the innocent ſhould be righted. I need not remind you (continued he) of the diſturbance I made

I made the evening we met at Vauxall; as ſoon as you and your party had quitted the gardens, the gentleman by whom you were attended, whoſe name, half-inebriated as I was, I do not recollect, inſiſted upon my giving him my addreſs, which I was upon the point of doing, when Mr. Craven, who I had before met in the gardens, joined us; he blamed your friend for the warmth he expreſſed about a matter ſo common, and told him that if he really had any ſerious thoughts of the girl he had juſt parted with, (ſuch was his expreſſion) he might think himſelf happy in eſcaping her, for that ſhe had long loſt all pretenſions to conſideration from a man of honour; adding, that as one inſtance of what he aſſerted, and of my ſuperior and prior right to her favour, it was on my account ſhe was diſcarded from her uncle, Lord Walton's, and that all the reſt of her family refuſed to take notice of her.

"I was warm in my reſentment of this ſcandal; but what is the reſentment or aſſertion of a drunken man? Mr. Craven ſaid much which I did not underſtand, but I recollect that he ſaid I left the houſe early in the morning, and you in the afternoon,

and

and that the whole neighbourhood who indeed had their ſuſpicions before, were fully convinced of the cauſe; which Lady Walton, by every thing but words had acknowledged; he added, that you reſided for ſome time in the neighbourhood where your father had been greatly reſpected, and that all your old friends were ſo well aſſured of your faulty conduct that they had refuſed to viſit or take the ſmalleſt notice of you."

During this account the countenance of our heroine underwent many changes. Shame, ſurprize, and indignation, by turns, took poſſeſſion of her ſoul. The circumſtance of her having been entirely neglected by the neighbourhood, during her reſidence at the houſe of farmer Williams, had, at the time, a little amazed her, but as it was exactly what ſhe wiſhed, and no accident happened to throw her into the way of them, ſhe believed it to proceed from the mean diſpoſition of mankind, who fly from misfortune as a peſtilential diſorder, and gave herſelf little concern about it. She could now account for the conduct of Sir William Beaumont, and clearly diſcern wherein his honour and love ſtood in oppoſition

ſition to each other. A flood of tears accompanied this thought, and ſhe caſt her eyes to heaven in an agony of grief which greatly affected the Counteſs, who ſaid every thing in her power to conſole her, telling her that now the cruel reports which had been ſpread were known, they would be eaſily refuted; adding, that ſhe ſhould herſelf be in England in a few months, and ſhe would then take care to inform any perſons whom ſhe would point out to her, of the real ſtate of the caſe, and did not doubt but it would be in her power to ſet all ſtraight again.

Colonel Vincent then proceeded to inform our heroine, that when his ſenſes returned, and he began to reflect upon what had paſſed, which ſwam like a broken dream before his memory; he collected enough of the cruel ſituation which the barbarity of his mother, and the general propenſity of mankind to believe tales of ſcandal and detraction, however improbable, had plunged her into; to induce him, as the only amends in his power to make her, to write a full account of all that had happened to Lord Walton; he informed him of every particular reſpecting the riſe

and progreſs of his paſſion for her, of the reſolution which he knew his mother had formed to baniſh her from his houſe before ſhe was acquainted with it, and the arts ſhe afterwards made uſe of to engage her to accept him for her huſband, affronting every one whom ſhe thought likely to be his rival, among whom Mr. Craven was one; and, at laſt, when her ſteady refuſal had defeated all her ſchemes, he requeſted of him to call to mind the infamous arts by which, as he had been informed, ſhe drove the lovely fugitive from his protection. The care ſhe had taken, by falling ill, and various other pretences to prevent his meeting her during her reſidence at Aſhford Park, and the falſe and infamous tales which ſhe every day invented to keep up his reſentment againſt her. I concluded, continued Colonel Vincent, with requeſting his Lordſhip to do juſtice to his own honour, and that of the loveliеſt and moſt amiable woman that ever adorned his family, by reſtoring her to the place in his favour, which ſhe had once ſo deſervedly poſſeſſed.

Caroline thanked him for the friendlineſs of his conduct, but ſaid ſhe had little hope of

of reaping any advantage from it; that ſhe knew Lady Walton's power over her huſband extended further than the mere art of deceiving him; that ſhe believed ſhe had never done that more than in part, for ſhe had reaſon to know that he feared her too much to appear to doubt any thing ſhe wiſhed him to believe. Col. Vincent ſhook his head in ſilence.

The Counteſs was ſo much pleaſed with an indiſputable confirmation of Caroline's account of herſelf, that ſhe politely invited the Colonel to ſtay all night, a permiſſion which he thankfully accepted, and ſupper being ſerved in, they all ſeated themſelves, with ſome degree of ſatisfaction, at the table, except Mrs. Meadows, who appeared quite diſconcerted, and out of all patience with the entire neglect ſhe ſuffered during the whole evening. The Colonel ſeemed, for ſome time, to have forgot that ſuch a perſon exiſted, and though a few hours before he was poſting in purſuit of her, firmly perſuaded that happineſs was attendant upon her ſmiles, the ſight of our Heroine, who had made a ſtronger impreſſion upon his heart than any other had ever been able to do, inſtantly extinguiſhed the tranſient

flame

flame ſhe had raiſed, and he now heartily wiſhed her ten thouſand miles diſtant from his ſight.

Supper was ſcarce removed when a note was delivered to the Counteſs, which, as ſoon as ſhe had peruſed—"This is unlucky (ſhe exclaimed) Mrs. Lane writes me word that ſhe means to leave Paris the day after to-morrow. She has already been appriſed of your intention, Miſs Aſhford, of returning with her to London, and ſhe begs you will be with her as early to-morrow evening as will be convenient to you. She likewiſe promiſes to take you entirely under her care and protection, and to do every thing we wiſh.

"Miſs Aſhford returning to London! (exclaimed Mrs. Meadows) what do you mean?" "Do not, Mrs. Meadows (anſwered the Counteſs, with a look of piercing ſeverity) aſk an explanation which it would give you pain to hear? You know that it is not proper for Miſs Aſhford to attend you! reſt ſatisfied with that conſciouſneſs." The aſſurance of Mrs. Meadows was not equal to anſwering this ſpeech, ſhe was ſilent, and the Counteſs told

told Caroline ſhe was extremely motified that her expectation of ſome relations of the Count's who were coming to ſpend a few weeks with them, and who would probably arrive the next day, put it out of her power to attend her to Paris, which ſhe greatly wiſhed to do. But that her carriage and ſervants upon whoſe attention ſhe could depend ſhould convey her ſafe to the houſe of Ms. Lane. Col. Vincent reſpectfully offered to eſcort her, which ſhe politely declined, till the Counteſs, who was very fearful in travelling, and had no notion of ſafety without a male protector, preſſed her to accept his offered attendance, to which, with ſome difficulty, ſhe was at laſt perſuaded to conſent, and it was agreed that ſhe ſhould ſet out the next afternoon, in the Counteſs's carriage, that lady not chuſing to venture her in the hired one which brought Col. Vincent.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXX.

A Rejection.

OUR Heroine had but juſt entered her appartment upon the evening preceding her departure, when ſhe was followed by Mrs. Meadows, who ſtrongly remonſtrated againſt her deſign of going back to England. She promiſed, provided ſhe would proceed with her according to her firſt intention, to be wholly guided by her advice, and poſitively to forbid Col. Vincent's following her. Caroline begged that ſhe would not requeſt what ſhe could not grant. She adviſed, nay entreated that ſhe would at all events forbid that gentleman's attendance, and by no means ſuffer him to follow or be with her, as ſhe vallued the ſmalleſt remains of honour and reputation. Mrs. Meadows, finding nothing

thing ſhe could ſay had the leaſt effect in prevailing upon her to change the reſolution ſhe had made to return, began, to upbraid her with caprice and ſuſpiciouſneſs of temper. She complained of the ill-uſage with which ſhe treated her, by going with her ſo far and then deceiving and leaving her without a companion, ſaying, if ſhe had not appeared perfectly willing to accompany her ſhe ſhould have enquired for ſome other, and might probably have heard of one leſs full of falſe delicacy and affected ſcruples.

To this Caroline anſwered, that the purpoſe for which ſhe was choſen as her companion, namely, that of leaving the kingdom in ſome degree of credit, was already anſwered; that ſhe would find her extremely ill-ſuited to ſuch a party as ſhe feared ſhe was about to join, and was convinced, that were ſhe to accompany her according to her firſt intention, ſhe ſhould only be an incumbrance to her, a poor lifeleſs, preaching, old-faſhioned being; and before the winter was half over ſhe would wiſh to rid herſelf of a ſpy, a ſtupid monitor, and a dead weight upon her pleaſures. In ſhort, Mrs. Meadows, after having in vain exerted all her eloquence in endeavouring

endeavouring to prevail in a point upon which ſhe had ſet her heart rather out of whim and a deſire to diſappoint the Counteſs than from any pleaſure ſhe hoped for in the company of our Heroine, took her leave, telling her, that if the truth was known, ſhe believed her motive for leaving her was the deſire of having Col. Vincent all to herſelf, and that the kind and excellent advice of which ſhe had been ſo very liberal was rather the offspring of jealouſy than of friendlineſs or prudence.

The next morning Mrs. Meadows did not make her appearance, ſending word by her woman that ſhe was not well and would drink a diſh of coffee in her chamber. The moment breakfaſt was removed, the Colonel riſing, begged he might be favoured by the Counteſs with five minutes walk in the garden. His requeſt was immediately complied with; and while they were walking, many kind and obliging things paſſed between Caroline and Miſs Dunford. They mutually expreſſed the utmoſt unwillingneſs to part from each other, promiſed to think of each other often, and to keep up a regular correſpondence till they had again the happi-

neſs

neſs of meeting, of which the journey the Counteſs propoſed ſhortly to take gave them the moſt agreeable proſpect.

They had juſt finiſhed theſe little arrangements ſo intereſting to the ſenſible feeling heart new to the charm of youthful friendſhip, when the Counteſs and Col. Vincent returned; the former, without ſitting down, requeſted Caroline to return with her into the garden; ſhe inſtantly followed her, and as ſoon as they had got to a retired walk, where the ſun, glittering among the ever-greens, made a perpetual ſummer, ſhe turned towards her with a ſmile, and ſaid "Do you know, Miſs Aſhford, that I am commenced match-maker, and have a great inclination to make the firſt trial of my talents in my new profeſſion upon you. You look ſurpriſed! I will explain myſelf: it is with ſincere regret that I ſee a young perſon of your beauty, merit and accompliſhments, in a ſituation ſo friendleſs and unprotected. The cruel injuſtice you have already ſuffered, and the conſtant injuries you have ſtill to apprehend from enemies whom intereſt, and ſince they have ventured ſuch unwarrantable lengths, ſelf-defence will for ever

ever continue ſuch, alarms me for your future welfare, and there are few things that would afford me greater pleaſure than ſeeing you the wife of a worthy man who loves, and will make your happineſs his ſtudy. Such, if I am not much deceived, is Col. Vincent. He has commiſſioned, nay intreated me to lay his heart, hand, and fortune, at your feet. The firſt, he ſays, has long been yours, and the laſt, which is now conſiderable, ſhall be diſpoſed of abſolutely at your choice and direction. Nothing can be more generous than his propoſal, nor could any thing be more reſpectful than the manner in which it was made—now, my love, what anſwer ſhall I return him? In my opinion, it ought to be favourable."

"How much, my dear madam, (anſwered Caroline) am I obliged to you for the kind concern you expreſs about me. The recommendations with which you have already favoured me, will, I doubt not, ſecure me from preſent inconvenience; but there is none I would not encounter, rather than become the wife of a man whom it is not in my power either to love or eſteem."

"Is not my dear young friend a little romantic?

mantic? (ſaid the Counteſs with a ſmile) Colonel Vincent does not appear to me to want underſtanding, good nature, or generoſity; three qualities, believe me, of eſſential conſequence in the married ſtate. He may not, perhaps, be quite ſo refined, ſo elegant, and well informed, as your imagination may paint the irreſiſtable mortal who is to conquer and poſſeſs your heart. But my dear Caroline, with all her charms, may paſs through life without ever meeting with ſuch an accompliſhed being."

"And why not paſs through life in my preſent ſingle ſtate? (interrupted Caroline) it is not ſurely neceſſary that I ſhould alter it! on the contrary, it would in my preſent diſpoſition of mind, be highly criminal. Colonel Vincent is exactly the ſame man whom I once refuſed; what ſhould change my ſentiments, but motives of the moſt mean and ſordid nature? Paſſion may for a while render him blind to them, but paſſion will not laſt for ever; and when he begins to ſee things by the light of unclouded reaſon, what have I to expect from the reſentment and diſappointed affection of a man who has been accuſtomed to act only

only from feeling, without the reſtraint of principal? Should I not have cauſe to fear the worſt evils, with that greateſt of aggravations, the conſciouſneſs of deſerving them? Theſe are ſurely reaſons ſufficient to vindicate my abſolute refuſal of the Colonel's generous offers. But there is ſtill a ſtronger, a more unſurmountable one. I will be perfectly ſincere with you madam, my affections are already in poſſeſſion of another. I have not the ſmalleſt proſpect of happineſs from my attachment, nor do I know, or probably ever ſhall, in what part of the world the object of it reſides; but it is unconquerable, and will for ever preclude all others."

"I have done (anſwered the Counteſs) never will I again urge you upon a ſubject ſo painful. But ſurely, my ſweet girl, nature never endowed you with ſo many perfections, only to diſtreſs others, without contributing to your own happineſs! it cannot be, continued ſhe warmly, this beloved wanderer will return, and I ſhall yet ſee you in a ſituation worthy of your merits."

Our

Our Heroine then requeſted the Counteſs to aſſure Colonel Vincent of her gratitude for the generous propoſal he had made her, but at the ſame time to give him the moſt complete and abſolute refuſal. She likewiſe begged that a promiſe might be obtained from him, of never mentioning the affair to her during the ride they were to take in the afternoon, otherwiſe, ſhe ſaid, it was her determination to go alone. The Counteſs promiſed to do all ſhe requeſted, and returned into the houſe for that purpoſe, while Caroline, who was in a few minutes joined by Miſs Dunford, continued to walk till the dinner bell gave them notice to return.

They found the Counteſs, Mrs. Meadows, and Colonel Vincent, ſitting at a diſtance from each other. The latter had his arms folded, and the moſt viſible dejection in his countenance; Mrs. Meadows had a fretful impatience in hers, and when Caroline entered, rage ſparkled in her eyes, which the preſence of perſons ſhe knew to be ſo much attached to her rival, obliged her to ſuppreſs. Dinner had been removed but a few moments when a ſervant entered to inform the Counteſs that one of the

the wheels of the coach was in ſuch a very bad condition that he durſt not venture to drive with it ſo far as Paris till it was thoroughly repaired, the doing of which would at leaſt take up half a day. She appeared greatly mortified by this account, it being the only one ſhe had then at home, one being gone to meet part of the company ſhe expected, and the other with the Count. Caroline begged ſhe would not give herſelf any uneaſineſs as the chaiſe in which Colonel Vincent travelled would do perfectly well; upon which ſhe ordered the ſervant to examine both that and the harneſs to ſee that they were in order, and upon his reporting that all was tight and ſtrong, ſhe conſented that her fair friend ſhould venture in it. Orders were accordingly given to have it got in readineſs, and in a few minutes it drove up to the door, attended by two ſervants belonging to the Colonel.

With tears of affection and gratitude our Heroine approached to take leave of her noble friend, who, tenderly embracing, bade her adieu, repeating the aſſurances ſhe had already given her of laſting friendſhip and amity; at the ſame time preſenting

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ing her a ſmall pocket-book, ſhe requeſted that ſhe would keep it for her ſake. Caroline kiſſed the little remembrance, promiſing never, voluntarily, to part with it but with life. Miſs Dunford was drowned in tears. She affectionately embraced her, bidding her remember her promiſe of writing ſoon, and of continuing to love her. She returned her embrace with equal tenderneſs, and anſwering only by a look full of expreſſion, hurried into the chaiſe, which, the moment the Colonel had followed her, drove away, leaving her friends to gaze after, and purſue it with their beſt and kindeſt wiſhes.

They had travelled ſome miles before either of them ſpoke; both, at laſt, began to wiſh a ſilence which appeared ſo unfriendly was broken, but neither could think of a ſubject proper for the purpoſe; at length the Colonel began by praiſing the underſtanding and agreeable qualities of the Counteſs du Barrongue, he could not have pitched upon a better; Caroline ſeized the occaſion to pour forth the effuſions of her warmly grateful heart. She was in the middle of a panegyric upon the uncommon benevolence and ſweetneſs of her diſpoſition, when an elegant carriage, attended

tended by three footmen, appeared in view; it drove at a conſiderable rate; notwithſtanding which, as it paſſed, our Heroine diſtinctly beheld Sir William Beaumont. She was convinced that he knew her, for ſwift as the carriages paſſed each other, ſhe ſaw him ſtart and throw himſelf forward as it were to command a fuller view of her. —Nothing could exceed her vexation at being ſeen, by him, in a carriage with Colonel Vincent; could any thing be a ſtronger confirmation of his unjuſt ſuſpicions? could any thing be more completely unfortunate?

The Colonel, ſurpriſed by her ſudden change of countenance, and the abrupt mannner in which her converſation broke off, began to fear that ſhe was ill, and enquired with much reſpect and ſolicitude if he could do or cauſe any thing to be done for her relief; adding, that if ſhe choſe to turn back again, which he would really adviſe her to do, he would immediately give orders to the ſervants for that purpoſe. Caroline, rouſed by this enquiry, replied, that ſhe only felt a tranſient faintneſs and ſhould be well in a moment, deſiring he would not be alarmed or think of returning,

ing, as what ſhe then felt was the effect of a diſorder to which ſhe had been lately ſubject, which though painful and troubleſome was by no means dangerous. The Colonel expreſſed the greateſt concern for her indiſpoſition, entreating that as ſoon as ſhe arrived in London, ſhe would take the advice of an eminent phyſician. She thanked him for his friendly anxiety about her, and ſaid ſhe would certainly omit nothing in her power entirely to eradicate a complaint which was attended with ſo much uneaſineſs.

Thus ſometimes converſing, with long intervals of ſilence, they entered Paris, driving directly to the hotel, where Mr. and Mrs. Lane (who had been moving from place to place, and only ſpent a few days in that city) had informed the Counteſs ſhe would find them. Upon ordering one of the ſervants to enquire if they were then in the houſe, he was anſwered in the affirmative, and that they had given orders if a young lady enquired for them to have her immediately ſhewn to their apartments. On hearing this the Colonel jumped out and offered his hand to our Heroine, when juſt as ſhe was ſtepping down, the carriage

ſhe had lately met paſſed ſlowly by, and ſhe ſaw Sir William looking at her with an earneſt and obſerving aſpect. The moment he perceived her eye meet his, he gave a ſignal to his ſervants, and the horſes ſetting off at full ſpeed were out of ſight in an inſtant.

Caroline was for a moment unable to move, till reminded of her ſituation by Colonel Vincent who aſked her if it would not be more agreeable to her to walk in than to ſtand at the door of a hotel. She reached with ſome difficulty a room, that was cloſe by, where, ſinking into the firſt chair, ſhe fainted away. The Colonel's fright was exceſſive; he ordered a ſervant to inform Mrs. Lane, that Miſs Aſhford was there, but too ill to attend her immediately. This meſſage brought down both her and her huſband, who had her carried up into the room, where with proper aſſiſtance ſhe ſoon recovered, and was received by Mrs. Lane with the moſt cordial politeneſs; ſhe aſſured her that nothing in her power ſhould be omitted to ſerve her, and that till an eligible ſituation could be found for her reception, ſhe ſhould be happy to conſider her as a

part

part of her own family; adding, that her duty as well as inclination would lead her to oblige and be uſeful to a perſon ſo ſtrongly recommended by the Counteſs du Barrongue.

CHAP. XXXI.

The Diſmiſſion.

CAROLINE was a little mortified to leave a city ſo celebrated as Paris, without at leaſt enjoying a trancient view of it. She would willingly have ſtayed a few days longer, which ſhe perſuaded herſelf was in order to ſee the many things it contained ſo well worth inſpection. But a conſcious bluſh which ſpread itſelf over her fair face while ſhe half expreſſed the wiſh, would have convinced any perſon of diſcernment that it was ſecretly prompted by a cauſe, a hope more intereſting. She enquired if there was an Opera that night, upon

upon which Mrs. Lane replied that there was, and if it would be agreeable to her and Mr. Lane would attend her to it. This offer ſhe gladly accepted and they went accordingly. During the firſt part of the performance her eyes were inceſſantly wandering from one box to another in hope of diſcovering the only object which in the preſent ſtate of her mind could fix their attention, but her ſearch was in vain, no Sir William Beaumont appeared; ſhe ſtrove to confine her thoughts to the entertainments of the ſtage, but this was equally vain, and ſhe returned with ſcarce the ſmalleſt remembrance of any circumſtance which had paſſed, except her diſappointment.

Soon after their return to the hotel, they retired to reſt; and, early in the morning, quitted Paris, proceeding with all poſſible expedition towards Calais, where they embarked for England; and after a quick paſſage and pleaſant journey, arrived at Mr. Lane's houſe, in Sackville Street.—There our Heroine was welcomed in the kindeſt manner, Mrs. Lane requeſting that ſhe would think herſelf at home till ſuch time as a ſuitable ſituation could be found for her. This amiable and worthy

thy couple lived in all the elegance and chearfulneſs which youth, health, taſte, and fortune can be ſuppoſed to enſure. Nor were their enjoyments deadened by exceſs, or their hearts hardened by extravagance and diſſipation. They were known and viſited by all the faſhionable world, but, except twice a year, none but a ſelect and favoured number were ever admitted into their houſe, which was conſtantly filled with people of the firſt characters and abilities in the kingdom; their converſation and ſociety being greatly prefered by them both, to the inſipid affectation of uninformed elegance. In their moſt favourite friends, as in themſelves, politeneſs and underſtanding united, but where both could not be had they conſtantly prefered the latter.

Mrs. Lane was ſo much pleaſed with our Heroine, and ſo deſirous of preſenting her to ſuch of her friends whoſe converſation ſhe thought would afford her entertainment, that a week paſſed before ſhe could find an opportunity of going to Red-Lyon-Street. An hour of leiſure at laſt preſenting itſelf, ſhe informed her friend where ſhe wiſhed to go, who immediately deſired that ſhe would make uſe of her coach upon that

or

or any other occaſion. But Caroline rather chuſing to pay this viſit in a hackney one, a ſervant was ordered to attend her, and ſhe ſtopped at the houſe where Mr. Sanders uſed to lodge. The miſtreſs of the houſe coming to the door, to anſwer to her inquiry, whether Mr. or Mrs. Sanders were at home, anſwered, that Mr. Sanders had been dead more than a month, and that his wife and daughter were gone down to Cornwall, where ſhe believed they intended to live with ſome relations who had ſent to invite them. This account greatly ſhocked her. She found the woman knew nothing of his affairs, and therefore ordered the coachman to drive directly back to Sackville-Street.

As ſoon as ſhe entered, Mrs. Lane's woman requeſted, in the name of her lady, that ſhe would ſtep into her dreſſing-room, having, ſhe ſaid, ſomething to communicate to her, which ſhe hoped would afford her pleaſure. She inſtantly obeyed the ſummons, and as ſoon as ſhe entered, Mrs. Lane told her that ſhe had juſt received a letter from a lady in Oxfordſhire, to whom ſhe had written about her, knowing that ſhe wiſhed for a companion, provided ſhe could meet with one whoſe education, manners, and

and connections, were unexceptionable; and that ſhe was ſo much pleaſed with the account ſhe had ſent of her, that ſhe wiſhed her to ſet out for her houſe immediately. She is an old lady, continued Mrs. Lane, who lives upon a handſome jointure, in a very genteel, though private manner. She will require nothing from you, but ſuch little kind offices as your own good-nature will prompt you unaſked to perform. I have heard you ſeveral times ſay, that you did not wiſh to be placed in too gay a family, and that you ſhould prefer a country to a town reſidence. On theſe accounts I hope the houſe of Mrs. Vincent will be agreeable to you, but ſhould it prove otherwiſe, you have nothing to do but return to me, and I will look out for one more eligible.

Caroline returned a thouſand thanks to her kind patroneſs for the obliging and friendly intereſt ſhe took in her affairs. Said ſhe could not wiſh for any thing that appeared more promiſing for the time ſhe ſhould probably ſtand in need of it, than the ſettlement now offered her, and that ſhe would, with her permiſſion, attend Mrs. Vincent the very next day. This being ſettled to the ſatisfaction of both, ſhe went into her apartment to arrange ſome little matters

matters preparatory to her departure. Looking into the trunk in which her clothes were contained, the pocket-book that had been given to her by the Counteſs du Barrongue, which ſhe had placed there for ſecurity, during her journey, preſented itſelf to her view; ſhe took it up, and imprinting upon it a grateful kiſs, opened it, expecting to ſee the inſide equal in elegance to its external appearance; when, to her exceſſive ſurprize, ſhe beheld an Engliſh bank-note for one hundred pounds, with the words, Miſs Aſhford, written in that lady's own hand upon the back of it. Tears of affectionate ſenſibility flowed from her eyes, at ſight of this generous teſtimony of friendſhip, and ſhe replaced it more delighted by the motives which had made it her's, than with the poſſeſſion of it; though ſhe conſidered that as a comfortable ſecurity againſt any diſagreeable accident that might befal her before the time on which ſhe hoped to reclaim her own little independency.

The following morning ſhe ſet out in a hired chaiſe, attended by one of Mr. Lane's ſervants, for Oxfordſhire, and before the cloſe of the evening, arrived at the houſe of Mrs. Vincent, where ſhe was received

by the old lady with great kindneſs, and the weather being extremely cold, placed in a great chair by the ſide of a large fire, the comfortable warmth of which revived her half frozen ſenſes.

The houſe was large and convenient; but it was ſcantily furniſhed, and every thing in it was of a kind as little expenſive as was conſiſtent with common comfort. There were no more ſervants than were abſolutely neceſſary to keep it in decent order, no pleaſure grounds, but a tolerable kitchen garden; no carriage, but an old poſt chaiſe which juſt ſerved to drag the old lady an airing; in ſhort, every thing appeared to be for mere uſe, without the ſmalleſt regard to propriety, elegance, or pleaſure. Our heroine was not greatly delighted with the face of things in her new habitation, but ſhe reſolved to endure much reſtraint and inconvenience rather than change it before the time, when ſhe expected to poſſeſs her little fortune. A great part of her time here was perfectly at her own diſpoſal, but there were no means of ſpending it pleaſantly. There was no books, no muſical inſtruments; ſhe had at the time of her uncle's misfortune ſent her's, which had never been unpacked

packed ſince her removal from Aſhford Park to Mrs. Williams's. And as her continuance with Mrs. Vincent would in all probability be ſhort, as it depended upon Mrs. Foreſter's removal, ſhe did not think it worth while to ſend for them. The old lady never left her bed before noon; after ſhe had taken her chocolate, an airing regularly ſucceeded, on which ſhe expected Caroline conſtantly to attend her; ſhe never went but one road, and exactly to the third mile ſtone, at which her horſes turned back without waiting for directions from the driver. Dinner, which conſiſted of ſome little diſh delicately cooked up for herſelf, and a plain joint for the family, was always ready by the time of her return. After which ſhe ſlept for an hour in her eaſy chair, and when ſhe awoke, was fond of hearing Caroline read ſome religious book, of which a ſmall number, all of the methodiſtical kind, were ranged upon a ſhelf in her bed-room, where, except at dinner-time, ſhe conſtantly ſat. She never drank tea nor allowed it to any of her family, but as a particular favour and diſtinction granted permiſſion to our heroine to uſe it. From tea-time to ſupper, if ſhe was not too much fatigued, the book was reſumed, for ſhe uſed to ſay, a large portion

tion of each day ought to be devoted to acts of piety and the fulfilling of the law; and as reading and praying were the only good things ſhe felt herſelf diſpoſed to do, or rather could do, without applying to her purſe, ſhe laid the greateſt ſtreſs upon, and never omitted them be the occaſion what it would.

Such was the life which the young, beautiful, elegant, and well-informed Caroline was condemned to lead. She ſtrove to ſupport her ſpirits with a reflection that it would not probably be long before ſhe heard from Mrs. Foreſter an account of her brother's return to England. She remembered that ſhe uſed to ſay he would be at home before Chriſtmas; that feſtival was now at no great diſtance, and ſhe might reaſonably hope that a few weeks would bring her the welcome information. The hope of independence was ſtill ſweet, though the retirement of which ſhe uſed to think with ſo much pleaſure had loſt all its charms. The death of Mrs. Seward had robbed her of the only perſon whoſe friendſhip and ſociety ſhe depended upon. The falſe and ſcandalous reports which had been ſo maliciouſly circulated and believed in the neighbourhood diſtreſſed her, and laſt

not

not leaſt, her heart which, while ſhe ſo much enjoyed the ſweets of retirement, was undiſturbed and eaſy, now felt an anxious reſtleſſneſs, which required ſomething more to divert or ſoothe it than ſolitude could afford. No ſtate could, however, be more completely irkſome than what ſhe at preſent experienced, and a whole long month paſſed away in which ſhe had no pleaſure except from the kind and affectionate letters which ſhe received from the Counteſs du Barrongue and Miſs Dunford, in anſwer to thoſe ſhe had written to them upon her firſt arrival in England; they were directed to Mrs. Lane, and by her forwarded to the place of her preſent reſidence: This ſatisfaction, which was of the pureſt kind, excepted, not a circumſtance occurred which could enliven a ſingle moment; the evening was long and melancholy, the morning dreary and hopeleſs.

She had one evening been reading till both her eyes and voice were fatigued, and was ſtill going on, becauſe any thing was better than the peeviſh enthuſiaſtick converſation of Mrs. Vincent, when they heard a coach drive up to the door; it was the firſt ſound of the kind, except that of Mrs. Vincent's own poſt-chaiſe, which ſhe had

had heard ſince her reſidence in the houſe, and the ſurprize it occaſioned in her was nearly as great as that of the old lady appeared to be. "Bleſs me, (exclaimed the latter) who can it be? I am ſure I expect nobody. My nephew is abroad, ſure it cannot be my niece! Go down, Martha, (continued ſhe, turning to her houſe-keeper, who happened to be in the room) and let me know who it is; let nobody come up till I know who they are. They may be thieves who have taken this method of getting into the houſe. Run down and tell John to know who they are before he opens the hall door," Away ran the houſekeeper with the ſwiftneſs of fear, but in a few moments returned with all the joy of relieved terror in her countenance, crying, "O dear Mam, to be ſure it is young madam herſelf, and ſhe has got a fine young gentleman with her, who ſhe bade me tell you is your huſband, and that they have been at his uncle's, and have called upon you in their way to town. O dear me, Mam, ſhe is ſo fine, and has got ſuch a coach!"—"Hold your fool's tongue, (exclaimed Mrs. Vincent) it is my niece, let her come up. I ſuppoſe ſhe has married ſome wild extravagant young fellow, and wants me to give them ſomething to live upon

upon. Believe me, I think her brother has had enough to ſatisfy one family, and I have relations of my own, and cannot beſtow every thing upon my huſband's." As ſhe ſpoke theſe words the door opened, and what was the aſtoniſhment of our heroine when Mr. Craven entered, leading in Miſs Weſt.

They walked directly up to Mrs. Vincent, and the latter, in a few words, informed her, that being lately married to one of the moſt conſiderable gentlemen in the county of Weſtmoreland, and a man whoſe excellent and agreeable qualities were far more valuable than his large fortune, ſhe thought it would give her pleaſure to ſee them, and therefore would not paſs ſo near to her houſe without paying their duty to her; ſhe had juſt finiſhed her ſpeech with her uſual volubility and livelineſs, when happening to turn her eyes towards Caroline, ſhe gave an involuntary ſtart; but inſtantly recovering, ſhe drew herſelf up, and returned, for our heroine's obliging inquiries after her health, only a very ſtiff courteſy. As for Mr. Craven, his looks betrayed not the ſmalleſt token of recollection, and during the whole evening, they both behaved to her in all reſpects,

except

except politeneſs, as perfect ſtrangers. Mrs. Vincent was fond of politics, and delighted to hear that her new nephew was a ſpeaker in the houſe; nay, ſhe remembered to have read his ſpeeches, and approved his ſentiments and opinions. Before the evening was at an end, ſhe became ſo fond of him, that all her own relations were wholly forgotten, and ſhe promiſed to ſtand god-mother to his firſt child, and leave it all ſhe was worth, which ſhe told them, one way or other, amounted to a ſum worth its acceptance.

As they ſeemed inclined to ſit up late, Caroline, who was weary of being a mere cypher, attending to converſation ſo little pleaſant or intereſting, retired to bed, leaving the field clear to the enemy. So perfectly free from art or malice, was her own boſom, that ſhe could neither ſuſpect or guard againſt them from others. Nor did her preſent ſituation appear to her ſufficiently deſirable to induce any one to diſturb her in it. She therefore lay down without the ſmalleſt apprehenſions concerning what was paſſing in Mrs. Vincent's apartment, or the leaſt curioſity about it.

The

The next morning, upon entering the parlour where ſhe uſually breakfaſted, ſhe found three cups and ſaucers placed upon the tea-board, from which ſhe underſtood that Mr. and Mrs. Craven intended to breakfaſt with her. A little reſentment for their laſt night's behaviour, and diſlike to the thoughts of giving them an opportunity of repeating it, determined her to return to her chamber, but juſt as ſhe was leaving the room, Mr. Craven entered: He approached her with more than uſual ſoftneſs in his eyes and manner, "How extremely am I concerned, Miſs Aſhford, (ſaid he) to find you in ſo friendleſs and diſagreeable a ſituation. Is there any thing in my power to ſerve you? I beſeech you to command my intereſt and fortune." "All the power you had to injure me, Sir, (replied Caroline) you have exerted. Your ſervices I am not in want of. I muſt indeed be poor when I would owe obligations to a man I deſpiſe!

"My dear creature! (cried he) theſe flights are abſurd and uſeleſs. You are not now that angel whom every one approached with love which bordered upon adoration. You have proved yourſelf a woman,

woman, and muſt expect to be treated as ſuch; but you are ſtill a lovely, a bewitching one, and if my whole fortune will purchaſe your favour, I ſhall eſteem it well expended." A look of inexpreſſible amazement, which theſe words occaſioned in our heroine, was quickly changed into one of ineffable contempt, too ſtrong to admit of any expreſſion in which words could clothe it. Without deigning to ſpeak ſhe quitted the room, leaving the aſtoniſhed Craven almoſt convinced that ſuch real and unaffected dignity could only be the attendant of virtue. But this effort only ſupported her till ſhe reached her chamber; there, throwing herſelf into a chair in an agony of mind not eaſily to be deſcribed, ſhe ſat a few moments almoſt unable to breathe; a ſhower of tears at length relieved her full heart, and gave vent to feelings too exquiſitely painful to be long endured. "And am I (ſhe exclaimed) ſunk ſo very low! Am I ſo loſt to honour and eſteem as to be ſubject to ſo groſs, ſo diſgraceful an inſult? Oh, my father, my preceptor, guide, and friend! what would you feel did you know the misfortunes to which your poor unhappy daughter is expoſed?" A freſh torrent of tears followed theſe ejaculations, and ſhe

ſunk

ſunk back in her chair in a ſtate of mixed mortification, reſentment, and diſdain. At length the latter principle, by degrees, began to gain poſſeſſion of her mind; wiping away her tears, ſhe roſe with calm dignity, exclaiming, in an even and ſteady voice—"Mean, unworthy man! thou art below my reſentment! The anguiſh I feel is a compliment to thy conſequence which it never can deſerve; but it is paſſed, neither thy malice nor inſult ſhall coſt me another tear."

While the mind of our heroine was thus diſturbed, having, by the utmoſt exertion of her reaſon, but half-calmed and compoſed it, ſhe heard a coach drive up to the door, and in a few minutes ſaw Mr. and Mrs. Craven ſtep in. The aſſurance that they were gone, did more to re-eſtabliſh her tranquility than any argument with which her underſtanding could furniſh her; ſhe had nearly regained her former ſerenity, when Mrs. Martha came to her door to inform her, that her miſtreſs would be glad to ſee her immediately. In a few moments ſhe went to her room, where ſhe found the old lady half-dreſſed, with much ill-humour and vexation in her looks.

"I cannot

"I cannot imagine (ſaid ſhe, as Caroline entered) what Mrs. Lane could mean by ſending ſuch a perſon down who is ſo ill-ſuited to my purpoſes. I wanted a young woman who is not above being uſeful. One who can get up my ſmall linen, ſit up with me when I am not well, in turn with Martha, and make a bit of paſte or a cuſtard upon occaſion." "I think, indeed, (replied Caroline, calmly) ſuch a one would be much better ſuited to your family, and I am ready to make room for her this very day. If you will be obliging enough to let one of your ſervants ſtep to Oxford (for they were not three miles diſtant from that city) and order a poſt chaiſe, I will quit your houſe in three hours." "Oh, I ſuppoſe (replied Mrs. Vincent) you have places enough to go to; girls, of your ſtamp, never want friends or accommodations while you have whole faces; yes, yes, go along, I want no ſuch. As for a poſt-chaiſe—I think the ſtage-coach will do very well. Your trumpery ſhall all be carried to Gooddy Hart's, by the road ſide, and there you may go too, and wait for the firſt place you can get. Go, go, (continued ſhe) make no ſpeeches; the ſooner you are out of the houſe the better."

Poor

Poor Caroline, before depreſſed, was for a moment ſtupified by this unmerited ill-treatment. She was too well acquainted with the perſon from whom ſhe now received it, to attempt to perſuade or undeceive her. She therefore inſtantly hurried out of her apartment, and returning to her own, in a few minutes put her things into travelling order, and her trunk being corded by the footman, was carried to a cottage by the ſide of the road, through which the ſtage coaches paſſed, to which place ſhe immediately followed it. She had not waited more than half an hour when one of them appeared, and the coachman being aſked if he had any room on the inſide? anſwered, that he was full, but he could take the young woman on the box if that would do. The next which came in ſight, was hailed in the ſame manner, and anſwered, that he had room in plenty. Upon the door being opened, Caroline found that the vehicle contained only one old lady, of a reſpectable appearance. This circumſtance gave her much ſatisfaction, for never having before been in a conveyance of that kind, ſhe had not conceived the moſt favourable opinion of the general

general manners of thoſe who travelled in them. Getting in, therefore, with great alacrity, ſhe directed her trunk to be put in the baſket, and the carriage drove off on its way to London.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXXII.

The Benevolent Man.

OUR heroine and her fellow traveller ſoon entered into chat upon the different ſubjects that preſented themſelves as they paſſed along; the old lady upon ſeveral occaſions gave proofs of obſervation and underſtanding ſuperior to what is every day met with; Caroline was greatly pleaſed with her converſation, and in return ſhe appeared much taken with her. Indeed it was her general fortune to render herſelf particularly pleaſing to old people, for whom ſhe always profeſſed great reſpect and tenderneſs, and never failed when the leaſt benevolence and goodneſs was diſcoverable about them, to treat them with every poſſible mark of attention.

They

They were thus journeying on, enjoying the ſunſhine of a remarkably clear evening, when the word ſtop ſuddenly ſounded in their ears, and a determined fierce looking man rode up to the door with a piſtol in his hand, ordering them immediately to deliver their money; he had not much reſiſtance to apprehend, both the ladies had watches, and each a purſe, which they inſtantly offered; the old lady begging that he would be ſo good as to keep his piſtol out of the coach; not ſatisfied with this prize he inſiſted upon ſearching them, and began with the old lady in ſo rude and violent a manner, that the terified Caroline immediately pulled every thing out of her pockets, in one of which ſhe had unfortunately put the preſent given her by the Counteſs du Barrongue. Having taken poſſeſſion of every thing the travellers had about them, he politely wiſhed them a good journey, and rode off.

Poor Caroline endured this loſs with that reſolution with which neceſſity always inſpires a mind directed by philoſophy and good ſenſe; ſhe ſubmitted becauſe reſiſtance was impoſſible, and ſubmitted with patience becauſe ſhe knew it was in vain to repine; the loſs of her pocket-book was the only

only circumſtance to which ſhe found it difficult to reconcile her mind, ſhe reproached herſelf for having been ſo careleſs as to travel with it about her, and with wanting preſence of mind enough to requeſt the highwayman to return it, which had he been put into poſſeſſion of its contents, it was probable he would not have refuſed. Theſe reflections were diſturbed by her companion, who ſaid ſhe hoped ſhe had ſome friend to meet her at the inn, in London, as ſhe was now robbed of her money and of courſe would want the means of paying for her paſſage. To which Caroline replied, that the friends to whom ſhe was going were of conſiderable conſequence, and would readily ſupply her with what ſhe had occaſion for, but the cauſe of her coming to town being a ſudden one, they were wholly unacquainted with it. "Well (anſwered the old lady) you muſt ſend a porter from the inn to let them know what has happened, that will be your only way."—Caroline replied, that ſhe had a pretty large trunk full of valuable cloaths, which if it was neceſſary ſhe could put into the hands of the maſter of the inn as a ſecurity for payment; to which her fellow traveller anſwered, that would do very well.

It was early in the morning when the coach ſtopt at the Swan and Two Necks, Lad-lane. As ſoon as they alighted a young man ſtepped up to the old lady, crying "Well, mother, I am glad to ſee you returned at laſt; faith, if you had ſtaid much longer I muſt have got married, there's no living without a houſe-keeper. She ſeemed equally pleaſed to meet him, and deſired him to call a coach and put her bundles into it, for ſhe longed to be at home. Caroline, who was frighted at the thoughts of being left alone in her perplexed ſituation, begged ſhe would have the goodneſs to to ſtay till her payment was ſettled; upon which ſhe related to her ſon the diſaſter that had happened to them, and deſiring him to call the landlord, walked into a ſmall room by the ſide of the bar, in order to adjuſt the affair. When the maſter of the inn appeared, he heard the caſe with great civility, and upon being informed that a good depoſit would be put into his hands, ſaid it would be the ſame as payment. The trunk was then ordered to be brought, but upon the return of the waiter, who was ſent for it, they were informed that no ſuch thing was to be found. It was in vain that a further ſearch was made among the baggage, which

which came in and about the machine, it was no where to be met with, and as it was not entered, no account could be given of it.

This misfortune was of a ſerious nature, and our Heroine felt in the ſevereſt manner; but this was neither a fit time or place for lamentation. What was to be done? —While this queſtion was debating, the young man aſked what the money was that ſhe owed? and being told, offered to pay it, ſaying, there was honeſty in the young lady's face, and if ſhe never paid it, he could not give ſo many ſhillings to a prettier woman. He accordingly ſatisfied the landlord, and taking five ſhillings out of a handful of ſilver which he held, offered it to our Heroine, telling her perhaps ſhe might want it to pay coach hire.

Caroline thanked him in the moſt grateful manner, but declined further to increaſe her debt than was abſolutely neceſſary, ſaying, the friends to whom ſhe was going, would, ſhe doubted not, both ſupply her preſent wants, and enable her to repay the ſum ſhe had borrowed, for which purpoſe he gave her his addreſs. He then called a hackney coach, into which he handed her,

and at her requeſt, directed it to drive to Sackville-ſtreet.

Upon her arrival, the door was opened by a woman ſervant, ſhe was juſt ſtepping out of the coach, when to her unexpreſſible concern and mortification, ſhe was informed that Mr. and Mrs. Lane were gone to their country ſeat, an hundred miles diſtant from town, to ſpend the holidays, and that no-body was left in the houſe but herſelf, who lived, during their abſence, upon board wages. This intelligence completed her misfortunes. She was left without a ſhilling, without a friend to whom ſhe could apply for the ſmalleſt aſſiſtance; in the midſt of a city, to which ſhe was utterly a ſtranger, and in which ſhe knew not where to ſhelter herſelf from inſult and barbarity. She looked at the coachman, who ſtood with his hat off, and the door in his hand, to receive her further orders, with terror, neither daring to get out (conſcious that ſhe had nothing wherewith to ſatisfy his demand) or to increaſe her debt, by ordering him to drive further. During this dreadful ſtate of terror and uncertainty, ſhe recollected the card given her by the young man who had paid her paſſage in the ſtage, and taking

taking it out of her pocket, ordered him to drive to the Hay-market.

It would be in vain to attempt a picture of her ſtate of mind while ſhe paſſed along; all her reſolution and philoſophy ſunk before the dreadful apprehenſion of being turned into the ſtreets a friendleſs wanderer, expoſed to every danger of unprotected helpleſſneſs, every inſult of wanton cruelty. Full of theſe fearful ideas ſhe ſaw the coach ſtop before a grocer's ſhop, and the young man ſhe had ſeen at the inn ſtanding behind the counter ſerving a cuſtomer; he immediately came to the door, and ſeeing who was in the carriage, very civilly deſired her to walk in, to which ſhe making no objection, he pulled down the ſtep and offered her his hand.

With trembling limbs and a palpitating heart ſhe followed him into a little parlour at the back of the ſhop, where the old lady with whom ſhe had travelled, ſat looking over ſome papers, which a ſervant girl was ſhewing her. "Aye (aye cried ſhe, juſt as Caroline croſſed the ſhop) here has been fine doings indeed! well might Tom ſay he wanted a houſe-keeper; why what a quantity of bread has here been uſed; and for

porter

porter, I'm ſure here's twice as much ſet down as ever was uſed by him." "Why Mam becauſe my maſter keeps a great deal more company when you are out than when your at home (anſwered the ſervant) I'm ſure nothing's waſted nor given away neither; and many's the day when my maſter dined out that I was ſhort enough; there's not many ſervants would put up with it. "Your a ſaucy huſſy (anſwered her miſtreſs) you are too well uſed and don't know what you would have."

Here ſhe was interrupted by her ſon, who leading in Caroline, told her the young lady for whom he paid the paſſage in the ſtage coach, was come to return the money; at which words her countenance, which before had been very cloudy, cleared up at once, and ſhe begged her to ſit down, ſaying ſhe wiſhed every body were as honeſt as her it would give people pleaſure to aſſiſt them. Poor Caroline's agitation increaſed by theſe words to ſuch a degree that ſhe had hardly breath to inform her that finding her friend's family out of town, and not knowing any body to whom ſhe might apply for aſſiſtance, ſhe was come to intreat that they would recommend her to ſome perſon who would truſt her with ſubſiſtance for one week, by which

which time ſhe ſhould receive remittances from the country.

The face of her auditor ſcrewed up to the moſt ſupercilious coldneſs as our Heroine proceeded with her requeſt, and when ſhe had done ſpeaking, ſhe aſked her how ſhe could ſuppoſe they would venture to recommend her into any family, who were utterly unacquainted with her character? "For my part, continued ſhe, I ſuffered enough already by taking ſtrangers into my houſe; two years ago I loſt all the linen of one of my beds, two table ſpoons, and an Indian handkerchief, and all by a girl as genteel and well ſpoken as yourſelf; there's no truſting to appearances; ſharpers and girls of the town can take any ſhape, and look as honeſt and as modeſt as they pleaſe; beſides you cannot expect that we ſhould do any thing for you, who have already truſted you ſo far without knowing whether we ſhall ever be paid or not; believe me, a tradeſman has much ado to live and pay every body their own without ſuffering himſelf to be taken in by every ſwindler: what with the ſhop tax, and the tax upon windows and maid ſervants, and one thing or other a man can hardly ſtand upon his legs, much more maintain all the neceſſitous people

people he meets with; beſides if I were inclined to let you be here, I have not a ſpare bed if I had the world for it."

"It was not my intention (replied Caroline) to trouble you by remaining here, but I thought you could poſſibly be good enough to inform me where I might be taken in for only one week, I am certain of receiving a remittance by that time."

"I can really do no ſuch thing (replied the miſtreſs of the houſe) I would not upon any account recommend you without I knew your character; as you go along the ſtreet you will ſee a great many lodgings to let, ſome or other of them may probably take you in, for there are ſome of all ſorts; if ever you get any money I hope you will remember to pay Tom, if not, the firſt loſs is the beſt; ſo I would not have you to loſe your time, for I can do nothing more for you.

"Good God! (exclaimed Caroline) what ſhall I do? how ſhall I pay for the coach?" "Nay (returned the woman) that's your buſineſs; people ought to know how to pay for coaches before they ride in them; you cannot expect us who are quite ſtrangers

ſtrangers to lend you ſo much money." At this moment the young man, who had been out in the ſhop, returned, and hearing his mother's laſt words, aſked what money ſhe wanted; adding, that if a few ſhillings would be of uſe to her ſhe was welcome to them. "Oh to be ſure (exclaimed his mother) you are wonderfully generous! and pray when do you expect to have it again? but there are many kinds of payments, and I ſuppoſe ſhe is one of thoſe whoſe who will not ſtand upon trifles."

At theſe words our Heroine ſtarted up, her cheeks glowing with indignation, which for a moment overpowered all other ſenſations. "Be aſſured, madam (ſaid ſhe) that the moment I poſſeſs ſuch a ſum you ſhall be repaid what I owe you; in the mean time I will rid you of the further trouble you ſeem to apprehend from me." So ſaying ſhe left the room, and was about to quit the houſe, when the ſight of the coach, which ſtill ſtood unpaid before the door, met her eyes; ſhe ſtarted, a trembling ſeized her whole frame, and the coachman, (a large, dark, ill-looking, fellow) appearing, completed her tertors;

ſhe turned pale, and fainted away upon the ground.

Upon recovering ſhe found herſelf once more in the little parlour, ſupported by the old woman and a benevolent looking old gentleman, who ſeemed to view her condition with particular concern. "How do you do, young lady,? (ſaid he with tenderneſs) be comforted, your coach is paid, and I will furniſh you with whatever you are in want of; I am a father, and upon this occaſion wiſh to act the part of one to you."

Tears of gratitude and thankfulneſs, broken by the violence of her emotions, were all that poor Caroline could return for the goodneſs of her unknown friend, who turning to the miſtreſs of the houſe. "Cannot you, Mrs. Glover, let this young lady board and lodge with you? (ſaid he) I believe you will have no objection to taking my word for her ſecurity; but if you have I will pay you beforehand." "No, no, Sir, (anſwered Mrs. Glover) I know your pay too well; upon thoſe terms ſhe ſhall be welcome to board with us as long as ſhe pleaſes."

"Very well (replied the old gentleman) I am truly glad that I happened to come in as I did." "Oh, Sir exclaimed Caroline) from what wretchedneſs, what extreme danger have you ſaved me! but for you"—"No more of this my good madam at preſent (interrupted he) come Mrs. Glover, get a diſh of tea, your boarder looks ill and wants refreſhment." This order was to Caroline truly acceptable; ſhe was very thirſty, and began to feel great wearineſs, with an uncomfortable pain in her head and limbs; her eyes and cheeks burning, while her feet were cold as marble. After drinking ſeveral diſhes of tea ſhe told the miſtreſs of the houſe that ſhe would, with her permiſſion, lie down upon the bed for an hour or two, as ſhe found herſelf very weary and heavy; Mr. Wilſon, for by that name the benevolent friend, to whom ſhe was ſo much obliged was known, deſired ſhe would let him feel her pulſe, which as ſoon as he had done, looking very grave, he requeſted Mrs. Glover to put her quite to bed, and make her plenty of white wine whey, ſaying ſhe was in a very high fever. She was accordingly undreſſed, and the medicine preſcribed adminiſtered; but the exceſſive peterbations of her mind had too much affected the delicate frame upon which

which it acted; ſhe ſoon became delirious, and a phyſician who was called in, gave it as his opinion that her life was in conſiderable danger. In this ſtate ſhe remained near a week, during which time nothing was ſpared by the generous Mr. Wilſon that could contribute to her recovery. The fever at length left her but in ſo weak a ſtate that ſhe was unable to riſe from her bed.

At the firſt return of her ſenſes, the paſt diſtreſsful events appeared like an uneaſy dream; it was ſome time before ſhe could perfectly recollected the circumſtances that connected them; and her weakened mind, unable long to ſupport reflection, became confuſed as it endeavoured to pierce thro' the vail which ſeemed to obſcure it. By degrees, however, this vail removed, and ſhe clearly recollected every ſituation thro' which ſhe had ſtruggled, with ſo much difficulty and pain. In proportion as ſhe became ſenſible of the paſt, her anxiety for the future increaſed, and the uneaſineſs of her mind had more than once endangered a relapſe. Mr. Wilſon often viſited, and conſtantly gave her the kindeſt aſſurances of his continued friendſhip and protection. He would neither ſuffer her to mention her obligations,

obligations, nor the means by which ſhe propoſed to diſcharge the pecuniary part of them, telling her ſhe muſt firſt get well, and he would then hear all ſhe had to ſay, and aſſiſt her in every thing that lay in his power. I have a daughter of my own, would he cry, as young, as amiable, and almoſt as handſome as yourſelf; were ſhe in ſuch diſtreſs, how would I wiſh her to be treated? even ſo will I treat you; and till you are quite recovered, and able to return to your friends, you muſt look upon me as a father."

"Ah! (replied Caroline) claſping her fair hands together, and riſing her fine eyes to Heaven, I have no father, no friends! once I had both, but now I am forlorn and deſtitute.

"Then I will be your father, your friend, (exclaimed the old gentleman, with a look of extreme tenderneſs and benevolence.) I am not now very rich, but I ſhortly expect to be ſo, and then I will conſider you as my ſecond daughter. My girl has a generous open heart, and will rejoice at the acquiſition of ſuch a ſiſter."

This encouraging kindneſs greatly contributed to facilitate the recovery of our Heroine,

Heroine, who, in a few days after the fever had left her, felt her ſtrength ſo much reſtored, as to be able to riſe, walk about the room, and venture to converſe with freedom. She gave Mr. Wilſon ſuch a ſketch of her hiſtory, as appeared extremely to intereſt him, and he often, during her recital, declared that ſhe ſhould never again undergo difficulties and diſtreſſes, ſo ill ſuited to the delicacy of her frame, and the ſenſibility of her heart. In return for her confidence, he informed her that his name was not Wilſon, but being involved in a long and expenſive law ſuit, upon which a principal part of his eſtate depended, he had broken up houſe-keeping, and his daughter being with a relation as companion, he had reſolved to live in the moſt private and œconomical manner, till it was finally decided, an event for which he hoped every day. That by changing his name, he the more effectually ſecreted himſelf from his former acquaintance, with whom, ſhould the decree be unfavourable, he never more intended to mix; as the payment of arrears, the eſtate having been many years in his poſſeſſion before the preſent claim was heard of, would reduce his fortune to only a comfortable maintenance. But if on the contrary, it ſhould be given in his favour, as

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he had every reaſon to believe it would, the ſaving he had made, would pay the whole expence of the ſuit, and he ſhould reſume his old way of living, with double pleaſure and ſecurity. He added, that the claimant was a man of a very large fortune, and powerful connections, but he truſted in his right, and had great confidence that the decree would be ſuch as he wiſhed.

As ſoon as our Heroine found herſelf equal to the taſk, ſhe wrote to Dr. Seward an account of all that had befallen her, begging that he would ſee Mrs. Foreſter, and let her know the ſituation ſhe was at preſent in, and the neceſſity ſhe was under of ſharing with her the little income ſhe had hoped to continue to her, till ſhe was better provided for; but requeſted that if her brother was not yet arrived, ſhe would continue where ſhe was, till her coming down, when they would conſult what further ſteps were beſt to be taken. She begged the Doctor to ſend her up 50l. out of the principal of her thouſand, which ſhe ſaid ſhe hoped would diſcharge all the debts ſhe had contracted, and bring her once more to the only ſpot where ſhe had a probability of finding peace and ſecurity. This taſk being performed, ſhe felt her mind more at eaſe,

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not doubting but the Doctor would do every thing ſhe wiſhed, ſhe already fancied herſelf the inhabitant of Mrs. William's little apartments, and after the dreadful anxieties and anguiſh of mind ſhe had experienced, peace and independance, though in a ſituation the moſt obſcure, appeared real bleſſings.

CHAP. XXXIII.

A Diſcovery.

THE very morning after Caroline had written to Dr. Seward, ſhe was ſitting in her appartment, making ſome linen ſhe greatly ſtood in need of, with money to purchaſe which, Mr. Wilſon had ſupplied her, when that excellent man nocked at her door to requeſt that ſhe would come down to his dining-room, ſaying, he had a good fire, and a change of rooms was better for the health than conſtantly ſitting in one. She had every evening ſince her recovery drank tea with him there, and now readily accepted his invitation. He gave her his hand in coming down ſtairs, as he was ſtill but weak, and placing her by the ſide of his fire, inſiſted upon

upon her taking up a cup of chocolate which he had prepared for her. He then took up a volume of Cook's laſt Voyages, and ſitting down on the oppoſite ſide began to read; which though rather a monotoniſt, he did in a ſenſible and entertaining manner, frequently ſtopping to make remarks, which were often new, and always judicious.

While they were thus comfortably employed, a coach ſtopped at the houſe, and in a few moments they heard a ſmart rap at the door of the room in which they were ſitting. Without waiting for an anſwer it was opened, and in ruſhed Miſs Dunford. She flew to Mr. Wilſon with extreme joy, who claſping her in his arms exclaimed "My dear Harriot! my own girl!" She threw her arms round his neck with all the fondneſs of an infant, crying "My dear, dear father, how glad I am to ſee you!" Caroline remained in the moſt pleaſing wonder, when Miſs Dunford turning her eyes upon her, ſtarted with amazement, exclaiming "Miſs Aſhford! is it poſſible!" Caroline met her embrace with all the ardour of affectionate friendſhip. "Is it poſſible, indeed (repeated ſhe) is it poſſible, that it is to the father of my dear Harriot, I am indebted for the preſervation of my life,

life, for my eſcape from dangers far more dreadful than death! How wonderful is the guidance of providence (continued ſhe, lifting her eyes to heaven) how little have I deſerved to be ſo much the object of its care!" The old gentleman was quite tranſported; he had forborn to enquire particularly into her family from motives of delicacy, which ever declines to know more than it is wiſhed; and ſhe had avoided giving them, as believing it a ſubject unintereſting to him, and painful to herſelf, having ſo little that was worthy to relate of it. He joined the hands of the fair friends, calling them his daughters, fervently praying of heaven that he might be enabled to ſupport them as ſuch.

Being again ſeated Miſs Dunford told our Heroine that the Counteſs du Barrongue, was then at Mr. Lane's in Sackvill Street, that they came ſooner to England than they intended on accout of buſineſs, and took poſſeſſion of Mr. Lane's houſe, which they found uninhabited, except by one woman ſervant; that the family returned as ſoon as they were informed of their arrival, and were now all in town, as was a ſiſter and brother of the Counteſſes. That they had ſent a ſervant down to Mrs. Vincent's

Vincent's on purpoſe to bring her back, Mrs. Lane having heard a very ſtrange character of that lady during her late viſit to the country, quite different from that ſhe had received before, which induced her to recommend her as her companion; and that the account of her being returned to London a fortnight before the inquiry was made, had given the Counteſs, Mrs. Lane, and herſelf, extreme uneaſineſs. But it will now be all at an end (continued ſhe) for you muſt come with me back, where you will be received with as much joy as affection. Caroline having expreſſed the pleaſure ſhe felt at the hope of ſo ſoon beholding ſuch kind and amiable friends, Miſs Dunford, with ſome heſitation, and not without bluſhes, told her ſhe could likewiſe give her ſome account of her brother. "He was with us more than a week (continued ſhe) a ſhort time before our coming to England. The Counteſs gave him a minute detail of all that had befallen you from the time he ſaw you laſt, to your ſetting out for Paris; and ſhewed him the letter which you had written her from Mrs. Vincent's. He appeared extremely ſurpriſed and equally pleaſed with the account, which I found was very different from thoſe he had received from Lord

Lord and Lady Walton, which were full of complaints againſt your levity and diſreſpectful behaviour. And as (he ſaid) he was not quite ſatisfied with your conduct when he left England they had made the deeper impreſſion upon his mind; he had, till the Counteſs gave him this information believed that you lived with your uncle Sir Marmaduke, and being much offended by proceedings ſo different from thoſe he once expected from you, had reſolved to take no notice of you, either by letter, or any other way, till his return, as the moſt marked expreſſion of his diſapprobation. But he now longs to embrace and beg your pardon for the unjuſt and cruel neglect he has been guilty of. Indeed (continued Miſs Dunford) he began himſelf to feel the effects of Lady Walton's malignant influence, a conſiderable part of his ſtipend was ſtopped, and he was forbidden to return at the time he intended. And I have no doubt but ſhe would have compleatly ruined his expectations had not the death of his uncle put an end to her machinations."

"The death of his uncle (exclaimed Caroline) is Lord Walton dead?" "He has been dead this fortnight (replied Harriot) and

and your brother is in poſſeſſion of Broomfield, and except the dowager's jointure, his whole fortune." The ſhock, the mixture of ſurpriſe, joy and regret, which at once took poſſeſſion of our Heroine's mind, was nearly too much for her weak frame. Mr. Dunford obſerving her paleneſs, ſtepped to a ſide-board where a bottle of water ſtood, and pouring out a glaſsful begged her to drink it. She ſwallowed part of it and immediately felt herſelf revived. A ſhower of tears which fell to the memory of her uncle's paſſed kindneſs ſtill further relieved her, and in about half an hour ſhe was well enough to accompany Mr. and Miſs Dunford to Mr. Lane's.

When they arrived in Sackvill Street, they were informed that the ladies were all dreſſing, Miſs Dunford therefore leaving her father in the breakfaſt parlour, deſired Caroline to walk up with her; ſhe put her into her own chamber which was next to that in which the Counteſs ſlept, then ſtepping to that lady informed who ſhe had found, and in a few words related the accidents which had thrown her into the protection of her father. The Counteſs impatiently begged to ſee her, and the moment ſhe appeared, embracing her with the

the greateſt tenderneſs "My dear creature (exclaimed ſhe) have we at laſt found you? how many hearts will your ſafety and preſence rejoice!" She then ſent her woman to Mrs. Lane, to inform her of the happy news; in a few moments that lady entering the room expreſſed the higheſt pleaſure at ſeeing her, and begged her pardon, for the many uncomfortable hours ſhe had occaſioned by her ſo entirely miſtaking the character of Mrs. Vincent, of whom ſhe had heard the moſt reſpectable one. The Counteſs was extremely ſurpriſed to hear that ſhe was widow to the perſon from whom Col. Vincent inherited his name and fortune, and was filled with indignation at the inſolent behaviour of his ſiſter. When the name of Craven, was mentioned Miſs Dunford exclaimed "What Mr. Craven of Weſtmoreland? He is the perſon who ſues my father for the Cumberland eſtate. We are near relations and were upon the moſt intimate terms till about three years ſince, when my father happening to have a diſpute with one of his neighbours about a private road, requeſted Mr. Craven to look over ſome of his papers, in which he either found or fancied a title to a large eſtate which deſcended to our family from a diſtant branch. It was at his houſe that

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my father became acquainted with your brother, Miſs Aſhford, and out of regard and friendſhip to him Lord Walton forbade all intercourſe between them after the quarrel and law-ſuit was commenced." "I ſincerely hope (replied the Counteſs) that a few days will make him ſmart for his folly. But my dear Miſs Aſhford, do you know that we have a heavy charge againſt you? We have diſcovered that in the relation of your little hiſtory you have omitted tranſactions of a very important nature, in which your character is greatly concerned, and which ſhews your conduct and diſpoſition in a light wherein you did not chuſe to place them. You look ſurpriſed; but it is in vain to juſtify your ſincerity, or deny facts; we have, in the houſe, witneſſes that will teſtify againſt you." "Let us, however, give her fair play (ſaid Mrs. Lane) ſhe ſhall meet her accuſers face to face. I juſt now heard them go into the drawing-room; come, Miſs Dunford, bring the culprit along, ſhe ſhall take her trial this moment." So ſaying, ſhe took the hand of our Heroine, who, though conſcious of no guilt, felt ſome uneaſineſs, and the Counteſs ſtepping before and throwing open the door of the drawing-room, the firſt objects which preſented themſelves

themſelves to her eyes, were Mrs. Foreſter and little Mary.

"Oh, my dear little Mama! (exclaimed the latter) look, look, Mama, it is Miſs Aſhford!" So ſaying, ſhe flew to her in a tranſport of joy. Caroline, ſtooping down, received her in her arms, while the grateful mother, unable to expreſs her feelings, ſeized one of her hands, upon which ſhe impreſſed a fervent kiſs. "Theſe, my dear Caroline, (ſaid the Counteſs) are your accuſers; theſe whom you have ſaved from periſhing in want, whom you have ſupported at the expence of your own comfort, almoſt of your life. Little did I think when you told me that you looked forward to a day of independence, that it was your goodneſs to my ſiſter which kept it at a diſtance." "Your ſiſter! (cried Caroline) Is it poſſible that I can have been ſo fortunate?" "Yes, my dear preſerver, my friend, my protectreſs, (exclaimed Mrs. Foreſter) this is the ſiſter to whoſe ſuperior virtues and underſtanding I bore teſtimony when you kindly liſtened to my melancholy ſtory. But oh! how could I ever have endured reflection, had your goodneſs to us been attended by the dreadful effects of which my ſiſter ſpeaks! had I

ſuſpected the change in your condition, I would have begged for my ſupport ere you ſhould have ſuffered ſuch inconveniencies while I enjoyed the comforts of life at your expence." "Let us not, my dear Madam, (anſwered our heroine) think upon the diſagreeable events that are paſſed. Sincerely do I congratulate you upon the happy change in your circumſtances, which will, I truſt, both for your ſake and that of this ſweet child, continue in future as happy as you can wiſh them." "I have (replied Mrs. Foreſter) the kindeſt and moſt generous of ſiſters, who, like you, bids me forget all the pains that are paſſed. My father has been dead ſome months; the time of his deceaſe happened while I was in my deepeſt diſtreſs at the cottage. My brother has likewiſe been in England, but as I was then cut off from all intelligence, both theſe circumſtances eſcaped my knowledge, till I laſt week read an account in a public paper of his election for the county which my father repreſented. I immediately came to town, and to my inexpreſſible joy, had the good fortune of finding my ſiſter. My brother (continued Mrs. Foreſter) I have not yet ſeen, nor can I think of his arrival, which is every hour expected, without fear.

"Your

"Your apprehenſions, my dear, (replied the Counteſs) are altogether unneceſſary: there is not a worthier, more amiable, or generous man upon earth, than our brother. My father's circumſtances, at the time of his death, were much better than was generally expected, which, together with the eſtate left him by my uncle, which is more than five thouſand pounds a year, puts it amply in his power to provide for you and our dear little Mary, eſpecially as the Count abſolutely refuſes the fortune he has generouſly offered me."

While this explanation was making, Mr. Dunford, who ſtood quite ſtill at a farther part of the room, advanced, and the Counteſs, her ſiſter, and Mrs. Lane, ſurrounded him in a moment; as ſoon as he could diſengage himſelf from them, he took the hand of our heroine, and, kiſſing it with parental fondneſs, "I have heard (ſaid he) that men were ſubject to be deceived by falſe appearances; I thought I only had a beautiful woman under my care, but find it was an angel." Caroline ſmiled at this affectionate piece of gallantry, and replied, that ſhe feared a little further acquaintance would too certainly convince him, that his benevolence and protection

had been exerted in favour of a weak, erring mortal.

Dinner being now announced, they all walked down to the dining-parlour, Miſs Dunford taking one of Caroline's hands, and little Mary the other; on their way down, the former told her, ſhe was almoſt as much ſurprized as herſelf at the Counteſs's accuſations, for having been out when Mrs. Foreſter arrived, ſhe had not heard any particulars of her ſtory. In the parlour they were joined by Mr. Lane and the Count; and Caroline, who was a favourite with both of them, was again welcomed and congratulated. Having ſat a ſhort time after the cloth was removed, the ladies retired to the drawing-room, where they were ſoon joined by the gentlemen: a whiſt-table being placed. the Count and Counteſs, Mr. and Mrs. Lane, Mr. Dunford and Mrs. Foreſter drew for places; the firſt and laſt couple ſat down, while the other joined Caroline and Miſs Dunford in ſenſible and lively chat, while little Mary ran prattling firſt to one and then the other, admired and careſſed by all.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXXIV.

Another Diſcovery.

THEY had not long continued in this ſituation, when a travelling chaiſe and four ſtopped at the door. "My brother! (exclaimed the Counteſs) in a joyful accent, come, come, Mary, don't look as if you expected a Spaniſh Don full of rage and vengeance, believe me, you have nothing to apprehend from his anger and reſentment, they have long been changed into pity." Mrs. Foreſter ſtill looked uneaſy, and was ſcarce able to riſe, as the whole company did, when the door opened; but judge the aſtoniſhment and confuſion of our heroine when the ſervant announced Sir William Beaumont, and ſhe beheld that ſo much beloved author of many an uneaſy moment enter.

Every

Every eye ſparkled with joy when he appeared, and all preſent, Mrs. Foreſter and Caroline excepted, thronged round to welcome him. He returned their ſalutations in the moſt kind and graceful manner, and when the Counteſs preſented her ſiſter, telling him that the poor prodigal was returned both to them and to herſelf, he embraced her with the moſt unreproaching tenderneſs, aſſuring her, that it ſhould be his care to baniſh from her mind every remembrance of paſſed ſorrows, and to render her future life as happy as the extent of his power could make it; he then turned to the beautiful little Mary, and beſtowed upon her ſuch praiſes and careſſes as delighted the heart of her fond parent. While he was thus employed, and Mr. Lane was requeſting and the reſt of the party to be re-ſeated, the Counteſs took the trembling hand of Caroline, and leading her up more dead than alive towards her brother, "I muſt not (ſaid ſhe) forget to preſent to you a third ſiſter, and one who is worth the other two put together; nay, my dear Miſs Aſhford, ſurely you will not deny me the pleaſure of beginning an acquaintance between two perſons, who are ſo happily formed by ſimilar virtues and excellencies for intimacy and friendſhip."

Sir

Sir William approached our heroine with viſible emotion. "To behold Miſs Aſhford (ſaid he) and to wiſh her happy, muſt ever be the ſame act. Were it ſafe to judge of the mind by its proper index, I ſhould, without heſitation, pronounce her faultleſs." As theſe words did not imply a former knowledge, Caroline endeavoured to recover herſelf, and courteſying with the diſtant civility of a ſtranger, was ſilently retiring to her chair, when Mrs. Foreſter taking hold of her other hand, with eyes full of affection, "You tell me, Sir William, (ſaid ſhe) that my return to my family gives you ſatisfaction, behold in this moſt amiable of women, the guardian-angel who preſerved me and this helpleſs innocent from periſhing in want and obſcurity; to her bounty were we many months indebted for the ſupport of life, a bounty which her own ſevere diſtreſs could not induce her to withdraw." "I am ſorry (replied Sir William, with a ſoftened look and accent) that goodneſs and beauty ever ſhould be ſubject to misfortune, but ſuch is the inequality and imperfection of human things; while the ſun ſhines in its fulleſt ſplendor on one part of the landſcape, a dark and heavy cloud overſhades the other." He ſpoke theſe words with a ſtrong emphaſis, and a

ſigh

ſigh which ſeemed to ſtruggle from the bottom of his heart. Caroline was too much affected, ſhe turned aſide to hide her emotions, and it was with much difficulty that ſhe kept herſelf from fainting.

In a few moments, every body had reſumed their places, Mr. and Mrs. Lane were called for at the card-table, and the Count and Counteſs cut out; at the ſame time ſome more friends dropping in, a ſecond was ordered, and Caroline and Miſs Dunford drawn for by the gentlemen. Our heroine fell to the ſhare of Sir William Beaumont, who with great politeneſs and gallantry, informed her of his good fortune, and handed her to the table. As they paſſed the Counteſs, ſhe turned to her Lord, and in a whiſper loud enough to be diſtinctly heard by the whole company—"What a charming couple are they (ſaid ſhe) I ſincerely wiſh the partnerſhip was for life." The pale cheeks of Caroline were inſtantly in a glow, and the hand Sir William held, which before was very ſteady, trembled ſo much that the Baronet, who partook of her emotions, immediately relinquiſhed it, but not without a gentle involuntary preſſure which greatly increaſed its violence. During the whole rubber, ſhe

ſhe never ventured to lift her eyes to his, ſcarce was ſhe able to ſpeak the few words neceſſary to the game, and when Miſs Dunford, who as well as herſelf was naturally very chearful, ſaid any lively thing which forced a ſmile, it reſembled thoſe of dying ſaints, patience and ſweetneſs triumphing over anguiſh.

Sir William kept his eyes almoſt conſtantly fixed upon her face; his inattention to play was evident, and his countenance now expreſſed the higheſt degree of admiration, now the tendereſt pity, and now the deepeſt regret. The Counteſs who watched him cloſely beheld theſe emotions with ſurpriſe, nor could ſhe by any means account for thoſe which appeared in her fair friend, but ſhe was ſo much concerned for her apparent indiſpoſition, that as ſoon as the rubber was ended ſhe inſiſted upon her not beginning another, ſaying ſhe plainly ſaw that the fatigue was too much for her, ſhe accordingly aroſe, and followed by her partner ſeated herſelf by the fire. He enquired with much anxiety how long ſhe had been ill, what advice ſhe had had, and ſeveral other particulars, in which he appeared greatly intereſted. She longed to enter into an explanation of her conduct,

once and again her lips were open to aſk him if he recollected ſeeing her at Paris, knowing that the mention of Colonel Vincent would have led directly to the ſubject; but the effort was vain, ſomething at the moment ſhe was about to ſpeak ſeemed to deprive her of breath, and they cloſed again in ſilence; ſhe therefore gave up the deſign, leaving it to the courſe of events to clear her or not in his opinion, as chance and accident ſhould direct. After a little time, however, her ſpirits were ſufficiently recovered to enter into converſation with him, if not with her uſual livelineſs, in a manner ſo ſenſible, elegant, and pleaſing, that Sir William ſeemed to be upon the point of forgetting that rigid honour which was wont to keep inclination in awe; when ſuddenly ſtarting as from a dream, he aroſe, and folding his arms acroſs his boſom, remained for ſome moments in a ſtate of profound thoughtfulneſs, then aſſuming an air of eaſy chearfulneſs, you mean to play no more this evening, Miſs Aſhford, ſaid he, I think I ſhall undertake another rubber, ſo ſaying he bowed careleſly and walked to the card table, where, leaning over the back of Miſs Dunford's chair, he continued to watch the progreſs of the game till it was ended, and it being the laſt of the rubber,

rubber, he immediately cut in and ſat down to play.

Mr. Dunford and Mrs. Foreſter being out, joined our Heroine the moment Sir William quitted her, and they were chatting upon a variety of ſubjects, when ſhe was ſuddenly ſeized with ſuch a ſhivering fit that the chair upon which ſhe ſat ſhook with the violence of her agitation. The company were extremely alarmed, and her altered countenance, which from paleneſs had aſſumed the higheſt fluſh of hectic crimſon, increaſed their apprehenſions.—Sir William was among the firſt and moſt concerned who approached her; he took her hand which a moment before had been cold as marble, but now glowed as if ſcorched by an internal fire, and feeling her high and irregular pulſe, his face was over-ſpread with a livid paleneſs, and he begged the Counteſs immediately to ſend for the beſt aſſiſtance.

All joined in intreating her to go to bed, with which ſhe would willingly have complied, but found herſelf unable to ſtand, or riſe from her chair. While all were offering their aſſiſtance, Sir William, with a tenderneſs and delicacy peculiar to himſelf,

took

took her gently in his arms, and carrying her with the ſame care with which a mother bears her favourite child, placed her in an eaſy chair by the ſide of her bed. Every one then retired, except the Counteſs, her woman, and Mrs. Foreſter, who ſoon undreſſed and put her to bed, where ſhe was no ſooner placed, than they ſent the ſervant to give particular orders to have the houſe kept quiet, and the knocker muffled.

As ſoon as ſhe was gone, the Counteſs coming to the bed ſide, and taking the burning hand, which her fair friend, by way of bidding her good night, held out, ſhe affectionately kiſſed it, and looking upon her with extreme tenderneſs, "My deareſt Caroline, my friend, my ſiſter (exclaimed ſhe) what is it that diſtreſſes you? Tell me, my love? I too plainly perceive it is the agitation and diſturbance of your mind, which tears that delicate frame to pieces."

"Ah! Madam (replied our Heroine) ſeek not to diſcover more of my weakneſſes than you are already acquainted with. Add not to my misfortunes, the loſs of your eſteem."

"That

"That it is impoſſible (replied ſhe) my eſteem, my warmeſt affection, you muſt for ever poſſeſs. But anſwer me one queſtion. Have you ever before ſeen Sir Wm. Beaumont?"

"Oh yes! too, too often, (anſwered Caroline." "Good Heavens (exclaimed the Counteſs) is it poſſible, can he be the perſon for whoſe ſake"——"Dear Madam, interrupted our Heroine, do not deſpiſe me, weak and abſurd as I now appear, I am not the idle love-ſick girl my preſent follies may lead you to ſuppoſe." "No woman (replied the Counteſs) need be aſhamed of an attachment to ſuch a man as my brother. But if it will not fatigue you too much, will you favour me with a few particulars of what has paſſed between you?"

Caroline immediately informed her in what manner ſhe firſt became acquainted with Sir William and that he was the unknown perſon whom ſhe had heard Colonel Vincent mention her being with at Vauxhall, to whom Mr. Craven gave ſo falſe and cruel an account of her. She then related her meeting him again at Aſhford Park, and the inconveniencies his declaration in her favour, had brought upon her; and laſtly,

laſtly, her being ſeen by him in the chaiſe with Colonel Vincent at Paris, and again as ſhe was alighting at the Hotel."

As ſoon as ſhe had done ſpeaking, the Counteſs exclaimed "I perfectly underſtand the whole affair! He loves you to diſtraction; of that I was convinced before I knew the cauſe of thoſe ſtruggles he ſo evidently endures. Good night, my ſweet love, ſleep and get well. I will take care that Sir William ſhall not cloſe his eyes till he has received your pardon for daring to ſuſpect what his heart has all along declared to be a falſhood." Both ladies then kiſſed her in an affectionate manner, Mrs. Foreſter ſaying that ſhe was made for her brother, and no other man could ever deſerve her.

The moment the ladies quitted the chamber of their fair friend, they joined the company in the drawing-room, whom they found reduced to their own family, the ſtrangers having taken leave, fearing to intrude upon uneaſineſs they could not alleviate. Mr. Dunford likewiſe having ſtaid to know how ſhe found herſelf when they left her, followed their example; and little Mary being gone to bed, they drew their chairs in a circle round the fire, each expreſſing

preſſing their fears for the ſafety of their general favourite.

The Counteſs entered into a warm eulogy upon her manners and character, ſaying ſhe thought her, in every reſpect, the moſt perfectly amiable young perſon of whom ſhe ever had knowledge.

During this panegyric, Sir William ſat in a thoughtful poſture, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon the fire, inſenſible of its glare and heat. "My brother is a ſtranger to this lovely girl (continued the Counteſs) I will therefore give him a ſhort account of the many injuries ſhe has received, and the uncomfortable viciſſitudes through which ſhe has paſſed." She then related all the events of her life, in a clear and conciſe manner.

Sir William liſtened with the utmoſt attention when ſhe gave an account of her quitting Broomfield, and the cauſe of it, ſo different from that he had received from Mr. Craven, the moſt lively emotion was viſible in his countenance; and when ſhe related Colonel Vincent's account of the evening at Vaux Hall, his apology to Caroline, and the propoſal he made her by his

ſiſter's meditation; the cauſe of her going with him to Paris, and her joining Mrs. Lane at the Hotel, he could no longer contain the ſatisfaction and pleaſure he enjoyed, but riſing and claſping his hands together, in an extacy "if ſo (exclaimed he) I am among the number of thoſe who have moſt wronged her." He then acknowledged himſelf to have been the perſon who ſaved, her; that the firſt moment he beheld her, he admired her perſon to a degree of rapture; and that every hour of her company and converſation increaſed his attachment ſo much, that he had reſolved to declare his paſſion, and, if poſſible, unite himſelf for ever to one ſo lovely, engaging, and amiable, when the circumſtances with which they were already acquainted, interpoſed between him and happineſs. He then told them what they already knew, his having ſeen her at Paris with Colonel Vincent, which he ſaid, he eſteemed equal to a poſitive proof of her gilt; and that inſtead of paying a viſit to the Count and his ſiſter as was his intention, he had immediately quitted France, and returned to England, fully reſolved to drive her from his thoughts; an effort in which he had flattered himſelf with having in ſome degree ſucceeded, when fortune again threw her into his way, at a

place

place in which he ſo little expected to meet her, and the firſt glance convinced him that all his labour had been in vain, and that he was, if poſſible, more in love than ever. "It was my deſign (continued the Baronet) to have left this dangerous houſe to-morrow morning, had not the account I have juſt heard, altered my reſolution; but I am now fixed here, till the recovery of my angel ſhall impower me to receive the future colouring of my days at her hands."

Supper was ſcarce ended, when an eminent phyſician arrived, and attended by all the ladies, who were too anxious for his opinion, to be left behind, viſited the fair invalid, whom he pronounced to be in conſiderable danger.

As ſoon as he had written a preſcription, the Counteſs preſented his fee, requeſting that he would call again early in the morning, and continue his viſits at leaſt twice a day till they ſhould become unneceſſary.

With anxious and diſturbed looks, they returned to the ſupper room, where they found Sir William walking backwards and forwards in extreme agitation. The moment they entered "What is the opinion of

of Dr. ———, (ſaid ſhe) is Miſs Aſhford in danger?"

"The Doctor gives us hope (replied Mrs. Lane) but at the ſame time he wiſhes to arm us againſt the worſt." "The worſt (exclaimed Sir William) good God! but how does ſhe herſelf appear to be? Is her fever higher?" "It is higher (replied Mrs. Lane) than when ſhe was put to bed." Sir William then began to walk about the room again with a quicker pace, his arms folded, and his countenance expreſſive of the deepeſt anguiſh.

As no one could enjoy converſation, they all retired early to bed, except Mrs. Foreſter, who ſat up the whole night, declaring her beloved friend ſhould not be left a ſingle moment to the care only of a mercenary nurſe. She ſat the whole night by the ſide of her bed, gave her ſuch diluted liquids as ſhe was ordered to drink, and watched every look and motion with all the anxious care of a fond mother, who trembles for the life of an only child.

CHAP. XXXV.

The Female Phyſician.

EARLY the following morning, the Counteſs entered Caroline's chamber; ſhe found Miſs Dunford already there, who inſiſted upon Mrs. Foreſter's going to reſt for a few hours, and leaving her fair charge to her care, in which her ſiſter ſtrongly joining, ſhe at laſt conſented. They found the lovely object of their attention in a ſtate the moſt dangerous and affecting. She was in a high fever, and quite delirious. While they were ſtanding round the bed, Doctor ——— entered, who with a look of apprehenſion begged ſhe might be kept very quiet, and no one ſuffered to approach her whoſe preſence was likely in any

any way to affect her; adding, that he feared ſomething or other diſturbed her mind, and that every thing depended upon her being kept quiet and eaſy.——All, therefore, but Miſs Dunford and the nurſe, immediately retired; the Counteſs begged the Doctor would call again in a few hours and went back to her apartment, as did Mrs. Foreſter to hers. The Doctor was going down ſtairs to his chariot when he was met by Sir Wm. Beaumont, whoſe pale and diſordered looks ſpoke a ſleepleſs night and purturbated mind. They walked together into the breakfaſt parlour, where they converſed for ſome minutes; the Doctor then took his leave and Sir William returned to his apartment.

In about two hours they all met at breakfaſt, where each knowing how deeply the other was intereſted in the event of our Heroine's illneſs, ſuppreſſed a part of their own fears in compaſſion to thoſe of their friends; yet unable to think of any other ſubject they remained almoſt ſilent; but the concern and anxiety of Sir William gave to theirs the appearance of mere coldneſs; they were exceſſive, and tore his mind with anguiſh, eaſier far to be imagined than deſcribed.

While

While they were ſtill leaning over their tea a travelling coach ſtopped at the door, and they ſaw Mr. Dunford alight, followed by Mr. Henry Aſhford and Dr. Seward. The moment they entered, Mr. Dunford, without attending to the civilities uſual at meeting, enquired after the health of his dear Caroline, and upon being told that ſhe was very ill, he exclaimed "She muſt be well! By heavens, this is no time for ſickneſs! Tell her, her uncle has left her fifty thouſand pounds, with a full acknowledgment of the cruelty and injuſtice of which he was guilty in permitting her to be ſent from his houſe when he was in his own breaſt convinced of the falſhood of every accuſation brought againſt her. Tell her her brother is here, and impatient to embrace and give her every teſtimony of his friendſhip. Tell her her old friend Dr. Seward is come to preſcribe for her, both mind and body; and, laſtly, Tell her that I have obtained a final decree in my favour, and that her friend, Harriot, will have as good a fortune as herſelf. Tell her all this and my life for it ſhe is well and amongſt us in four-and-twenty hours."

Every

Every one expreſſed their ſatisfaction upon receiving each part of this intelligence, particularly the firſt and the laſt, which afforded them ſincere pleaſure.—The Counteſs likewiſe expreſſed the greateſt joy at ſight of Doctor Seward, of whom ſhe had heard her fair friend ſo often ſpeak in terms of reſpect and gratitude.

Henry expreſſed great impatience to ſee his ſiſter; he informed the Counteſs that he had in vain made enquiry after her, and began to be ſeriouſly alarmed for her ſafety, when Doctor Seward received a letter from her, by which he learned, to his great aſtoniſhment, that ſhe was fallen into the hands of his good friend Mr. Dunford, with whoſe feigned name and place of abode he was well acquainted; that he loſt not a moment in ſetting out to inform her in perſon of the happy change in her circumſtances, in which journey the Doctor, from motives of friendly affection to his ſiſter, reſolved to accompany him: he added, that he could not expreſs how great a diſappointment her illneſs was to him, eſpecially as he had a matrimonial ſcheme to propoſe to her which he had much ſet his heart upon,

on, and which he hoped would prove agreeable to her.

Sir William, who had till then ſtood in a muſing poſture, at theſe words ſtarted, and looking ſteadily in his face, ſaid he hoped, ſhould Miſs Aſhford's wiſhed for recovery afford them the happineſs of ſeeing her make a choice, it would be uninfluenced by any thing but her own judgment and inclination, ſince no one who was acquainted with the one could doubt of its being ſtrong enough to direct the other. The Counteſs obſerving Henry to look ſurpriſed, and as if doubtful whether he ſhould anſwer him with civility or be offended by his interference, immediately made them known to each other in the uſual form, a ceremony which in their preſent ſtate of uneaſineſs had been omitted. —This put all right again, and they exchanged every polite expreſſion of eſteem which a mutual knowledge of each other's characters inſpired.

Theſe civilities were interrupted by Dr. Seward, who requeſted that he might have permiſſion to viſit his fair friend, not, he ſaid, in the character of a phyſician, except he ſhould ſee a proper occaſion to preſcribe a men-

a mental doſe. The Counteſs offered to attend him to her chamber; but by the way, begged he would indulge her with a moment's converſation in her dreſſing-room, previous to his ſeeing their dear Caroline. She there told him, that little as ſhe was acquainted with the ſcience he profeſſed, reaſon informed her, that in order to preſcribe with ſucceſs, the phyſician muſt underſtand the diſorder of his patient, and ſhe believed it was in her power to give him ſome lights upon that head, which might be of uſe.

She then informed him of every thing that had paſſed between our Heroine and her brother, ending with a particular account of what happened the evening before.

The Doctor thanked her for ſuch important information. They then proceeded to the chamber where Caroline lay, attended by her watchful friend. Upon opening the door, it was with the greateſt pleaſure that they heard her ſpeak with perfect compoſure; and when the Counteſs came in ſight, ſhe ſtretched out her fair hand, and, with a faint ſmile, apologized for the trouble and diſquiet ſhe had given to ſuch kind friends.

"You will more than make us all amends, my love (replied the Counteſs) by getting well as faſt as poſſible. Every body is anxious for your happineſs; and all our preſent comfort depends upon your recovery. But do you know what phyſician we have brought to viſit you? What would you ſay if your friend Doctor Seward was arrived?"

A ſmile of pleaſure illuminated her countenance as ſhe heard theſe words, and the Doctor appearing, ſhe received him with more lively expreſſions of joy, than in ſo weak a ſtate could have been expected.

As ſoon as the firſt ſalutations were over, the Counteſs propoſed an airing to Miſs Dunford, ſaying, Mrs. Foreſter and little Mary were going to take one, and ſhe thought an hour of freſh air would be of uſe to her; adding, you muſt not look pale now; I muſt have no more of my friends ſick, juſt when fortune is pouring her choiceſt treaſures at their feet.

"But do you not rejoice to ſee our dear Caroline ſo much better (replied Miſs Dunford) I believe let Doctor ——, or Doctor

Seward either, think what they pleaſe, I have been her beſt phyſician."

She then informed the Counteſs that ſhe had taken the firſt opportunity which the abatement of the fever afforded, to relate to her lovely charge every circumſtance that happened after ſhe quitted the drawing-room the evening before, taking care to dwell particularly upon the concern Sir William expreſſed for her indiſpoſition, and the exceſſive pleaſure his ſiſter's account and explanation of the circumſtances which had occaſioned him ſo much pain, appeared to give him, together with his declaration that the future happineſs of his life muſt wholly depend upon her. "I aſſure you, (continued Miſs Dunford) my medicine had a wonderful effect, in ten minutes after it was adminiſtered, my patient was altered for the better, beyond what I could have ſuppoſed poſſible."

While the Counteſs and her fair friend joined the company below, and related the happy change which they hoped had taken place in the perſon for whom they were all ſo deeply intereſted, Doctor Seward in the moſt judicious and cautious manner, informed her of all the agreeable circumſtances

ſtances which had lately taken place, and with which the reader is already acquainted. The acknowledgement her uncle had made of his own injuſtice, and her innocence and rectitude, appeared to afford her inexpreſſible ſatisfaction, far more than the large legacy he had annexed to it. He told her that lady Walton was now execrated by all who had lately approved her conduct, and that ſhe quitted Broomfield, loaded with the curſes of her inferiors, and the ſcorn of her equals. That the world did not ſcruple to ſay that ſince the death of Lord Walton, Mr. Craven was extremely diſſatisfied with his marriage, being diſappointed of a conſiderable fortune which Lady W. had perſuaded him to believe her huſband meant to bequeathe to Miſs Weſt; and likewiſe undeceived with regard to her conduct, which great pains had been taken to ſet before his eyes in the falſeſt and darkeſt colours. The good fortune which had attended her worthy and eſteemed friend Mr. Dunford, likewiſe afforded her extreme pleaſure; and the hope which the Doctor gave her of ſhortly ſeeing her brother, appeared to complete her ſatisfaction.

In about an hour, the Doctor left her, fearing to fatigue her too much, even with

the moſt agreeable ſubject; he had not mentioned Sir William, further than to obſerve, that he was one of the fineſt looking men he had ever ſeen; and, he preſumed, a very particular friend of her's, if he might judge by the extreme anxiety he appeared to be under about her.

A faint glow which overſpread her face, informed him, that ſhe was not diſpleaſed by that intelligence, but he feared to diſturb her ſpirits, by giving the ſmalleſt alarm to her delicacy, and therefore left a further explanation to her female friends; or as he now hoped, very ſhortly to her lover himſelf.

On his return to the parlour, every inquiring eye was turned towards him, anxiouſly expecting a confirmation of their new raiſed hopes; the chearfulneſs of his countenance was ſufficiently intelligible; but when he aſſured them, that there was every reaſon to look for a complete and ſpeedy recovery, their joy was unbounded.

Sir William got up in a tranſport, ſhook him by the hand, called him his good angel, and expreſſed the moſt lively raptures.

A perfect

A perfect underſtanding had taken place between Henry and the Baronet, in conſequence of which the former, finding his ſiſter had favoured him with expreſſions of approbation, from which he flattered himſelf with a more than common intereſt in her affections, readily promiſed to give up the propoſals he had to make her, which were from his uncle Sir Marmaduke Aſhton, in favour of his eldeſt ſon. He ſaid they were ſuch, as had his heart been free from prepoſſeſſion, might have proved an agreeable means of uniting a family, which had too long been divided; but as that was not the caſe, he had neither power or inclination to oppoſe her choice, nor had it been left to his own, could he have wiſhed a more honourable alliance.

The company had likewiſe been informed of another attachment, which none but the Counteſs in the leaſt ſuſpected, between Mr. Henry Aſhford and Miſs Dunford; it had commenced before his ſetting out upon his travels, he having accompanied Mr. Craven upon a viſit to her father: when he firſt mentioned his admiration of her to Lord Walton, that nobleman appeared greatly to approve the alliance, but as ſoon as the rupture broke out between her father

and

and Mr. Craven, and in conſequence one half of Mr. Dunford's fortune became, according to the repreſentation of the former, more than doubtful, he abſolutely forbade his nephew to think of it.

He was, however, too generous to be influenced by motives ſo mean; a regular correſpondence was kept up between them during her continuance in England, and their meeting again in France, confirmed their attachment beyond the power of accident to weaken.

Upon Henry's arrival in town with Dr. Seward, he had taken the firſt opportunity to inform Mr. Dunford that the moment his Harriot would conſent to his happineſs, he was ready to fulfil his engagements, and make her, who poſſeſſed his whole heart, a ſharer in his fortune.

To which the old gentleman, who had a few hours before had a decree in his favour, anſwered, that he was ready to beſtow her upon him, together with 40,000l. which he would pay upon the day of marriage. Adding, that he ſhould have a good twenty remaining, which they muſt wait for, till death ſhould make a better proviſion for him.

This

This circumſtance was more pleaſing to Mr. Dunford, than the lover of Harriot, who felt a pride in demonſtrating his affection, by the diſintereſtedneſs of his conduct, and whoſe fortune was too ample to make that of his wife a matter of conſideration. However, as Lady Walton had a large jointure upon his principal eſtate, and having 50,000l. to pay his ſiſter, he found it no inconvenient addition.

Henry expreſſed the moſt impatient deſire to ſee his ſiſter, but Doctor Seward would by no means conſent to it, at leaſt till Doctor ——— had ſeen her. That gentleman arrived ſoon afterwards, and appeared quite amazed at the happy change which had taken place in his patient ſince his laſt viſit; he begged ſhe might ſtill be kept very quiet, and ſaid, if no relapſe happened, he had little doubt but ſhe would be able to leave her room in leſs than a week. Her brother, therefore, was not permitted to ſee her till next morning, when the comfortable night ſhe had paſſed, appeared ſo greatly to have refreſhed and ſtrengthened her, that Doctor Seward was of opinion his viſit would be of uſe, rather than hurtful to her.

Their

Their meeting was of the moſt tender kind; he lamented the pain his miſtakes had given her, and ſhe thanked him for the warmth of friendſhip his very anger (believing what he believed) expreſſed for her. In the courſe of converſation, he told her he had received a letter from Col. Vincent, in which he had acknowledged himſelf the ſuppreſſor of one ſhe wrote to him the day before his leaving Broomfield to make the tour, which had he received, it would not have been poſſible for him to have entertained a doubt of the propriety of her ſentiments and conduct, and that he knew his mother had ſtopped another which ſhe wrote ſoon after the death of her father, and ſent to Lord Walton, who was then at Bath, to be forwarded to him. Caroline no longer wondered at her brother's ſuſpicions, or blamed his anger, ſince not having received theſe letters, he had reaſon to believe ſhe neither feared his contempt, or valued his good opinion. This ecclairciſſement having taken place, and the hearts of each perfectly eaſed of the apprehenſion of having loſt the friendſhip of the other, Henry informed her of the propoſal which he had to make from Sir Marmaduke, in favour of Mr. Aſhford. She inſtantly ſtopped him, begging he would not

not diſtreſs her by the further mention of what could only give her pain. "I eſteem my couſin, (ſaid ſhe) and would do any thing to contribute to his happineſs, but deſtroy my own."

"I have done, (ſaid Henry) but married I muſt have you, and ſince this propoſal is not agreeable to you, I hope another, which was made me this morning, will be more ſo."

Caroline bluſhed, and, looking at her brother with a kind of baſhful apprehenſion, begged he would poſtpone all ſuch kind of affairs till ſhe was perfectly recovered, or rather till he had ſet her an example. "Well, well, (replied he) I believe, if I am not greatly miſtaken, Sir William Beaumont may be truſted to plead his own cauſe; I will only ſay, that ſhould your choice fall upon him, it will meet with my warmeſt approbation; his character is uncommonly excellent, and in his mind and perſon, the virtues and graces, ſo often at variance, are perfectly united."

A ſmile of pleaſure from Caroline was anſwer ſufficient, and gave her brother to underſtand, as much as words are capable of

of expreſſing. In return he promiſed, the next day, to introduce to her the lady he deſigned for her future ſiſter, a promiſe with which ſhe appeared greatly pleaſed, telling him he would then have a right to talk to her upon the ſubject.

While he was ſtill with her, Doctor ——— entered, and congratulated them both upon the rapid recovery ſhe made. Before he took his leave, he told the Counteſs, who had attended him to Caroline's apartment, that he would adviſe her to be well wrapped up, and take an airing the next day; and that he would not have her keep her room any longer, or ſeclude herſelf from her friends, but hoped ſhe would be cautious how ſhe ventured to public places, or expoſed herſelf, either to cold or fatigue, for ſome time to come, until ſhe found herſelf in full poſſeſſion of her natural ſtrength.

" When Mr. Aſhford returned to the parlour, and informed his friends in how ſhort a time they might hope to have his ſiſter once more among them, their joy was ſincere as lively; but that of Sir William was mixed with impatience; he wiſhed the night paſſed which divided him from what he then

then accounted happineſs, the ſight and converſation of her he loved. Henry was ſcarce leſs impatient, Miſs Dunford having promiſed to give him her hand at the ſame time that Caroline became the wife of Sir William Beaumont; nor had he much leſs reaſon to complain of abſence than the Baronet, almoſt every moment of his Harriot's time being ſpent in the chamber of his ſiſter.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXXVI.

The Concluſion.

THE next morning the whole family breakfaſted together in Mrs. Lane's dreſſing-room, where they were joined by our heroine, who was received by every one with the kindeſt and moſt joyful congratulations. Her countenance was pale, but ſpeaking life was returning to her eyes which ſeemed to beam with content, and ſometimes to ſparkle with hope. Sweetneſs and ſenſibility were ever the characteriſtics of her countenance, both now appeared heightened, and united to a delicacy ſo exquiſite, ſo truly feminine and intereſting, as paſſes the power of pen or pencil to deſcribe.

Sir

Sir William met and welcomed her, with a voice and look which at once ſpoke delight and apprehenſion. Fear is as conſtant an attendant upon true love as hope; both were lodged in his boſom; but the latter was predominant, and the ſmile and bluſh with which ſhe received his congratulatory compliments, were ſufficient in the opinion of any but a lover, to have put the matter out of all doubt. It was not indeed, her wiſh that it ſhould, for a ſingle moment, retain any. She felt a decided preference in his favour; ſhe was aſſured he loved her; and her whole behaviour was ſuch as, without the ſhadow of infringement upon the ſtricteſt real delicacy, informed him of her eſteem and approbation. He had that evening an opportunity of declaring his ſentiments without reſerve, and was treated with an openneſs and delicate ſincerity, which, while it inſured his happineſs, added to that love and eſteem upon which it was founded.

They had converſed more than an hour in the drawing-room, when the door gently opened, and Henry entered, leading in the half reluctant Harriot!

"Nay,

"Nay, my dear Miſs Dunford (ſaid he, as they came in) you muſt permit me to perform my promiſe. Then preſenting her to Caroline, I promiſed (continued he) to afford you an opportunity this afternoon of embracing the lady I hope to give you for a ſiſter. Behold the dear girl who permits me to look forward to the felicity of calling her mine; and tell me if you approve my choice or not."

"My deareſt Harriot (exclaimed Caroline) is is poſſible! and ſhall I indeed have the pleaſure of calling you ſiſter? Surely my fate is uncommonly kind, and allies me to all thoſe I moſt love."

"You ſee, ſiſter (ſaid Henry) how happy I am likely to be, and know that it is in your power to make me ſo, as ſoon as you pleaſe; every day, therefore, that I remain in the uncomfortable ſtate of batcheloriſm, I ſhall place to your account."

He then told her the promiſe Miſs Dunford had made him, of being married on the ſame day with her, which that lady confirming, our Heroine told him with a ſmile, that he muſt be a little merciful, and give her time to breathe, upon which condition

ſhe

ſhe would aſk for none to gratify affection or caprice; adding, I would not willingly deprive you of happineſs; and I am hard preſſed by another, who, perhaps, I wiſh to oblige as much as you.

Sir William kiſſed her hand in an extacy, and they ſoon afterwards joined their friends in the drawing-room, with looks that beſpoke perfect ſatisfaction and pleaſure.

In about a week, ſettlements being completed, and Caroline's health perfectly reſtored, the whole party ſet out for Broomfield, where the marriage ceremony was performed, reſpectively uniting two of the happieſt pairs that ever did honour to that ſacred inſtitution.

Having thus brought our Heroine to the ſtate of which, if happy, little is ever to be recorded, we think it a duty we owe our readers, to give a ſhort account of ſuch perſons as we have occaſionally introduced in our hiſtory.

Lady Walton reſided ſome time after the death of her Lord, in Cavendiſh Square, where Mr. and Mrs. Craven ſpent their winter with her; but her conduct, to the univerſally

univerſally admired Lady Beaumont, being warmly cenſured by every one, and finding herſelf little noticed by the reſpectable part of the great world, with whom her vanity made her wiſh to mix, ſhe returned to the South of France, where a good many years of her paſt life had been ſpent; but notwithſtanding the fineneſs of the climate in which ſhe breathed, her health began to decline, and ſhe died in leſs than twelve months after her arrival there.

Mr. and Mrs. Craven lived together but moderately; his temper, naturally reſerved, jealous, and obſtinate, became ſtill more ſoured by his diſappointment in her expected fortune, and the loſs of his ſuit with Mr. Dunford.

After the removal of Lady Walton, he refuſed to take a town houſe, gave up his ſeat in Parliament, and inſiſted upon her living the whole year in the country. As he had never been at all agreeable to her, this conduct, which diſappointed all her matrimonial views, rendered him her averſion. She at firſt ſtruggled hard, till finding reſiſtance in vain, ſhe was at length obliged to ſubmit; but takes every opportunity of railing at his ſordid, unfeeling perverſeneſs,

perverſeneſs, which he returns, by reproaching her with artifice, deceit, folly, and a long train of defects and ill qualities.

Mrs. Sanders continned to live with her friends in the Weſt; but Charlotte, at Lady Beaumont's requeſt, reſided chiefly with her, and improved ſo much by her example and inſtruction, that ſhe became an amiable and pleaſing woman. About a year after her arrival at Beaumont Lodge, ſhe was married to Colonel Vincent. They took a houſe in its neighbourhood, where they ſtill live in a very happy and reſpectable manner.

Charlotte & Colonel Vincent!

Miſs Maſon, ſoon after our Heroine left her, was married to Lord Danby, who by the death of her father, ſhortly became poſſeſſed of his whole fortune. They live in the moſt ſplendid ſtile, each purſuing thoſe pleaſures, which moſt attract their inclinations, without thinking it neceſſary that they ſhould be approved or participated by the other. Mrs. Meadows reſides chiefly with her Ladyſhip, whoſe way of living is exactly ſuited to her taſte.

Sir Marmaduke Aſhford died in a few months after the period which concludes

this hiſtory; his lady removed immediately to her jointure houſe, the ſame in which the late Lady Aſhford had reſided, and prevailed upon Mrs. Auſburn, who had been companion to her mother-in-law, to live with her in the ſame capacity, her uncommon love of books being the ſtrongeſt recommendation on both ſides. Mrs. Aſhford took a houſe in town, where her neice generally paſſes the greateſt part of the year with her; ſhe has had ſeveral lovers, but her exceſſive affectation and the evident motives of ambition and avarice by which both ſhe and her aunt are actuated have diſguſted thoſe who were her equals in birth and fortune, and all others are driven away by the laſt mentioned lady with rage and diſdain, who ſtill hopes to ſee her favourite one of the firſt perſons in the kingdom; but it is the general opinion that if both of them do not alter their conduct and manners it will be her fate to die in a ſtate of celibacy.

Sir Wm. Aſhford was ſome years before he could perfectly reconcile himſelf to his couſin's marriage; he made the tour of moſt part of Europe, and ſometime after his return married a very valuable lady of high birth and large fortune.

The

The Counteſs returned to France ſoon after the marriage of her brother, taking Mrs. Foreſter and Mary along with her, but ſoon after their arrival there, having the misfortune to loſe her huſband, Sir William and his Lady went over and aſſiſted her in ſettling her affairs; the Count having left her a large independant fortune, ſhe immediately gave up part of it to his nephew, and with the reſt came back with her brother and ſiſters to Beaumont-Lodge, where ſhe ſtill reſides, a moſt agreeable addition to their family circle.

Mrs. Foreſter continued with them for ſome time, when a mutual eſteem and affection being obſerved between her and Dr. Seward. The Baronet propoſed a marriage between them, to which neither objecting, it was celebrated at the Lodge with great feſtivity, and he preſented the Doctor with ten thouſand pounds as her dower. Mary ſtill continued ſuch a favourite with her little mama that ſhe ſpends more than half her time with her, though the Doctor having no family ſhe is become very dear to him, and likely to inherit his whole fortune, as well as her mother's which he has already ſettled upon her.

Mr.

Mr. Henry Aſhford was ſoon after his marriage created Viſcount Walton; he reſides chiefly at Broomfield, living in the moſt noble and hoſpitable manner; his whole conduct and that of his Lady doing honour to their rank and title. They every ſummer viſit Sir William and Lady Beaumont, or are viſited by them, and each having a town reſidence, where they uſually ſpend part of the winter, much of their time is paſſed in each others ſociety. Mr. Dunford has a houſe which he calls his home, but he almoſt conſtantly reſides with one of his daughters, who are equally pleaſed with his company and deſirous of contributing to his comfort, and his conſtant chearfulneſs is to them the moſt agreeable aſſurance that their endeavours are ſucceſsful.

As for Sir William and Lady Beaumont they live in all the elegance and chearfulneſs of genteel life without plunging into its follies and diſſipation; fortunate in their friendſhips and connections, pleaſed with their ſituations, and happy in each other; every day is marked by ſome virtuous act, and every hour winged with ſatisfaction and pleaſure.

FINIS.

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